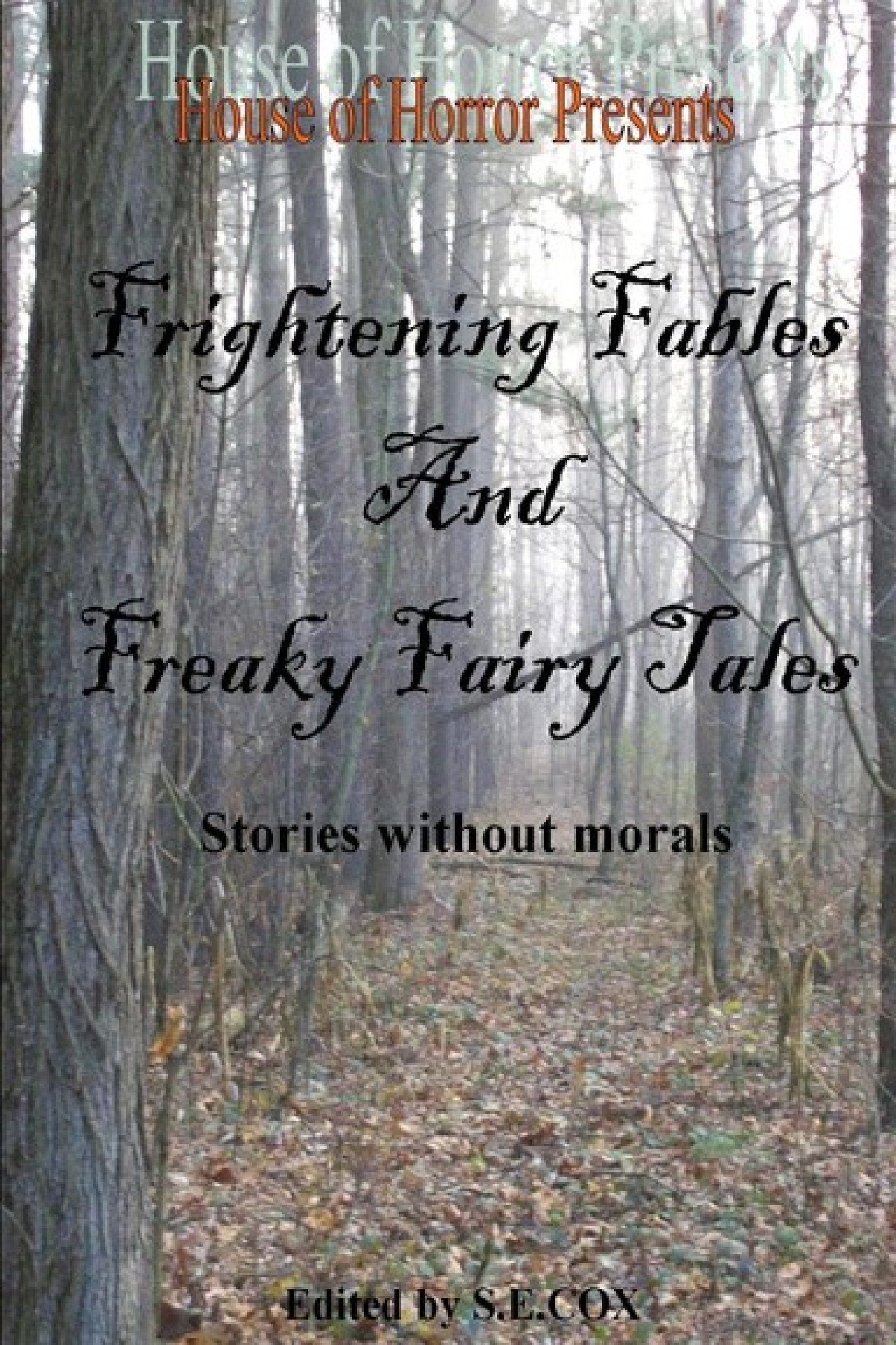

House of Horror Presents
Frightening Fables
And
Freaky Fairy Tales
Stories without morals
Edited by S.E.COX

HOUSE OF HORROR

PRESENTS:

Frightening Fables
And
Freaky Fairy Tales

© Copyright House of Horror 2010

All Rights Reserved

First Print Edition Published

In the

United Kingdom

Please note: All stories have been published by the author's permission. Each author holds all rights to their story; everything else belongs to House of Horror.

No part of this publication can be reproduced in any form including reviews and or previews without prior permission from the owners

This publication is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to real life people or situations is purely coincidental and should be treated as such.

Cover Art © ***Linda Manning 2010***
Inside Art © ***Jack S. Rogers 2010***

Edited by S.E.COX
Copy Edited by Nandy Eckle

Contents

Frightening Fables and Freaky Fairy Tales.....5
The 13th Step.....7
Bones in the Branches.....20
The Fruits of no Labors.....23
Were-spiders Bride.....27
A Wonderful Musician.....32
The Last Night of the Sandman.....37
Doc Hickory.....32
Gretel and then Hansel.....47
Mary.....54
The Three Wittle Brothers.....58
The Red Shoes.....65
The New Messengers of Death.....77
The Other Glass Slipper.....83
The Angel.....89
Little Red Riding Hood and Marcel.....93

Author Bios.....109

Frightening Fables and Freaky Fairy Tales

By
S.P. Oldham

It's right to warn you, gentle reader, before you turn another leaf, that these tales will entice you, but they are tales of grief.

These stories will enthral you, though you yearn to look away, they will have you jump at shadows in the middle of the day.

These tales are not for children, they are not simple, fabled guides; they will lead you just to horror, and churn your cold insides.

For the once imagined faces you first saw when you were small, and the dreamed of far-off places that were home to them all, become the faces of your nightmares, the places of your dread, and the good and kind and innocent, the rancid, rotting dead.

The woods are dark and shadowed; the sun is weak and hidden, the world is cursed, the folk are worse, their morals are a midden.

So take heed, if you will, and turn back now while you may, or else move on and luck be with you, if even luck dares stay.

The 13th Step

By
Thom Olausson

Mark stared at the computer screen. Where on earth had he ended up? He had been searching the internet for new publishers when he had reached a forum called The Hall of The Dead. It was supposed to be a forum where writers could share experiences. Mark could do with some good names of publishers. Some of the people in there seemed to have made progress and were willing to recommend sites that were happy to publish new stuff. Mark didn't recognize any of the publishers, which was strange since he had been searching the net regularly over the past three years. He guessed that there really was a brave new world out there.

The forum itself looked as if it was haunted and he was impressed by the design. Somehow, the web designer had managed to make it look as if there was real blood pouring down the inside of the screen. One would have thought it might cover the discussion, but it didn't. It poured around the words that appeared and never came close to the usernames. The background consisted of rotting corpses and skulls, and the three-dimensional depth was eerie. It was as if you could reach into the screen if you wanted to, Mark thought. The usernames were weird as well. Some of them were the usual: The Reaper, Death, Dark One, Lucifer, and so forth; but there were other weird names that didn't ring any bells to Mark: Choronzon,

Balban, Pyro, Verin, and some other names he'd never heard of. The names Alastor, Baal, Pytho and Jezebeth reminded him of something he once read about, but he couldn't remember where.

The name Lilith drew his attention in particular. It seemed so out of place in comparison with the others, quite normal. His own user name was Blackened and did fit in with some of the names, at least - Lilith didn't. He figured it was a woman, but one could never be too sure on the internet. There you could be whomever you wanted and no one would now any better.

At first, he just watched the conversations. He wanted to see if the forum was a good one or just one more filled with morons. Most forums were of the latter, and that was why he always hung back at first and watched. There seemed to be some kind of online story writing going on where the users made one sentence each. It went:

Pyro: I became the voice in his head that forced him to do it.
Balban: To persuade him I turned into the love of his life.
Pytho: I was the one that promised him whatever he desired.
Choronzon: Together we arose from the abyss and went to war.

Mark found the story that unraveled amusing but strange. It was almost as if they all knew the story in advance and each provided their piece of the puzzle.

One discussion caught his eye and he followed it carefully.

Alastor: I am telling you, the publisher in England that I use is great!

Lilith: I hear you, but I have never heard of him before. I've been around long enough to know most of the publishers by now.
Alastor: That may be true, dear, but this guy has just started up. He used to work for Kokomo Publishing but quit after a dispute. I know him well and he plans to publish my latest book.
Lilith: I might try him out then. What's the address? I mean, if he will print the crap you write, then he will love my stuff! ;-)
Alastor: Very funny! Remember who taught who, baby! Anyway, the address is www.tales-of-the-undead.com and he is accepting manuscripts at the moment.

Mark followed the discussion back and forth and finally decided to join in.

Blackened: Hi there! I'm a writer just like you and I wonder what kind of stories that guy likes? J
Alastor: who's asking?

He expected that reply. As a writer he knew how protective you could be, you didn't want others to move in on your territory. Suddenly a chill went down his spine as he noticed that all the other discussions had stopped, as if they were all waiting for his answer. Even the pouring blood on the inside of the screen had slowed down to a trickle. A feeling of being watched started to seep into his mind. It actually felt like they were watching him through the screen. Mark wrote a reply and then hit send.

Blackened: Like I said, I am a writer and my field is tales of the undead. That is why I wanted to know what kind of stories he wanted. I am a human.

Mark stared at the screen and wondered where that last line had come from. Why had he written that? It didn't make any sense at all. Of course he was a human, what else would he be? What a stupid thing to write. No answer came and Mark was certain that they all wondered what he had meant. He didn't know himself. It did sound nuts after all. He was thinking about logging of when the user Lilith answered.

Lilith: Welcome! Never mind old Alastor, he is just trying to be a hard ass. I know him and let me tell you, his ass is old, wrinkly and rather bony! J

Mark laughed out loud. Lilith had made him feel less stupid. He wrote back:

Blackened: Okay. I didn't mean to be rude when I joined your discussion. Just wanted some advice from the two of you since it seems that you've both been published.
Lilith: To be honest with you, most of us in here have been published at one time or another. I have been published many times, but no one in here comes even close to old Alastor.
Alastor: Leave this place, Blackened! You do not belong!
Lilith: Stop it Alastor! The man doesn't mean any harm.
Pytho: I have received awards for my work! Who are you? Maybe I have heard of you.

Mark just sat there for a while, smiling. Alastor and Lilith still argued about whether or not to let Mark join in. They made Mark think of two siblings having an argument about whether or not to let their younger brother join in the fun and games.

Blackened: My name is Mark Delouise, and I have had some of my work published.
Pytho: you are good! I enjoyed the story they ran in ***The Moonlight Magazine***. It was the story, *The 13th Step Into Hell,* I believe.

Mark felt glad that someone actually knew who he was. Pytho was right about which story it had been and in which magazine. After all, he had only been published in print once so far, so that might not be so strange. Yes, he had been published on quite a few sites, but that wasn't the same. No, it was being printed that mattered the most to him, and here he had the proof. Someone had actually read his work and remembered him.

Blackened: Thank you! I am really pleased with the story myself.
Alastor: Ah, I have read that story. It is worthless compared to mine! I guess your story is good for something and that is to wipe one's ass.
Lilith: Don't listen to him; he's just jealous. Old Alastor's work can fix your insomnia if you suffer from that…J

Mark thought the discussion was becoming stupid. Alastor and Lilith *did* behave like children.

Pytho: Lilith is right; Alastor is not a very good author. I have read your work *and* his, and I must say that you kick Alastor's bony old ass!
Balban: They are, of course, right, you know. I am an agent and have heard through the grapevine that you are considered to be picked up by a major publisher.
Alastor<Blackened: I hate you! I will fucking tear you apart, you worthless piece of shit! L

Mark had been to many forums and this was a clear violation of the rules. Threats weren't allowed and Mark hoped that the admin would ban Alastor. Alastor had whispered to Mark so the others couldn't see the threat but the admin could read everything. Something in the words almost seemed to jump out of the screen toward him, as if Alastor was staring at him and meant every word.

Lilith<Blackened: I have read your story and it was great! I am so glad that you have joined us. Whatever Alastor says, just ignore it, he is old and his chance to be famous has long since passed. He may have been published, but not many have actually read his work. You know, I have seen a picture of you and I think you're hot! ;-)

Mark stared at the last sentence. He felt confused. What was going on? Were they making fun of him? His picture had never been published, to his knowledge. There were so many feelings fighting in his head now that he didn't know what to say or do, feelings that didn't make any sense. He was a grown man, not some horny teen surfing the web! Still, Lilith's remark made him feel attractive. He didn't know why, but he did. Pytho made him feel proud. Balban stirred up hope and he could almost see his first published book ever. Then there was Alastor. He made Mark feel uncomfortable and scared. He hoped that the admin had warned him off.

Alastor<Blackened: You can hope all you want, you little shit! You're in the Hall of the Dead and there is no one to save you! When I get my hands on you, I will eat your intestines! Fucking worthless human!

Mark pushed away from the computer. What was this place? Why didn't the admin stop the user called

Alastor? And how could Alastor know what Mark was thinking? As he stared at the screen, more words from Alastor appeared and as he read them his heart started to pound like a jackhammer.

Alastor<Blackened: There is no admin; I have killed him and eaten his corpse! You may back away from the screen, but it won't help. I see you and will follow you wherever you go.

"What the hell!?" Mark said out loud to the screen.

Lilith<Blackened: I told you not to listen to old Alastor! He's just angry because you look and write better than he does.
Balban<Blackened: If you are interested, I want to be your agent. I know the business from within and can make you rich! Give me your email and I'll get in touch with you.

Mark felt dizzy. He didn't know what was going on. Alastor scared him but Lilith, Pytho and Balban didn't.

Samael<Blackened: We can see you Mark. You have been marked by the grim reaper and there is no way for you to hide. You belong to us now.

Mark read the words with a feeling of doom in his heart. The story '*The 13th Step Into Hell*' had a man called Samael in it. He had found the name in an article about Satanists. It was another name for the 'Angel of Death.' As he began to search his memory, Alastor's name appeared. According to that same article, it was the name of one of the most evil demons. Was this someone's idea of a joke? Had the users read his story and now used the information to make fun of him? He preferred that explanation as he

didn't dare to believe that he was actually being threatened by demons.

Lilith<Blackened: I want to suck on your soul. I need you to come inside me. It has been so long.
Samael: EVERYBODY STOP! *I* AM SPEAKING TO HIM.
Samael<Blackened: Yes, I am the Angel of Death. I know your fate. Once you get up from that chair, your destiny is sealed. On your thirteenth step, you will die.

Mark was shaking now. He had just been about to leave the room and the computer when Samael's words had turned up on the screen. The blood on the inside of the screen highlighted Samael's words in crimson red and filled him with terror. Would he die on his thirteenth step? He didn't want to die! That wasn't fair! He had been so certain he would become a famous author, that he would be remembered in the history books! Why should he die? He was young and healthy.

Samael<Blackened: You may try to escape your fate but it is useless. Sooner or later you will have to leave the chair and then you will seal your fate.

But he didn't want to die! He would do anything to live!

"I don't want to die!" he screamed. All went still and the blood on the screen slowed down to a trickle once again. New words appeared on the screen and Mark felt the hope rise within him as he read. A new user had joined the forum.

Old Nick<Blackened: Hey! Are you human? Boy, you're lucky I found you! This is a bad place and I have been

trying to stop the evil entities in this forum from luring mortal souls to this place. My name is Nick and I am a demon hunter. Have you been threatened by them?

"Yes! Thank you, God! I have been threatened!" Mark screamed at the screen. Somehow, God had seen what was going on and he had sent a savior to aid him. He waited for Nick, good Old Nick, to respond. As the words appeared, he damned himself for his stupidity.

Old Nick<Blackened: Are you there? If you are, respond back to me.

Of course Nick couldn't hear Mark. This was a human like himself and not a demon. Mark wrote:

Blackened<Old Nick: I am here! Yes, they have threatened me! They said that I would die as I take my thirteenth step after I leave my chair! What do I do? Is this some stupid joke?
Old Nick<Blackened: I can assure you that this is no joke. You have been cursed and I urge you to sit in your chair for now. I will look in my books and see if I can help. There might be a way. Wait and DO NOT LEAVE THAT CHAIR!

Mark did as he was told. The blood still trickled down the inside of the screen, but none of the demons sent him any new messages. After what felt like an eternity, Nick, the demon hunter, sent him a new message.

Old Nick<Blackened: I think I have found a way. This is a new ritual but it has proven to be the only way to escape a curse placed on you while on the internet. According to this book, you have to go to the religious site

www.HobsWish.com and join them. As a member there, it seems that you become immune to any form of curses placed on you through the internet. Even the Vatican has approved its legitimacy. It also says that you will have to open the site in a new window. If you close down the one where you got the curse, you will not be able to lift it. You'd better do as it says. Good luck! Let me know how it went.

Mark read what it said and felt a rush of gratitude toward Nick the demon hunter. He did as told and he typed the address given by Nick. As the browser opened the site, he became sure that this was the way to go. It had several golden crosses on the top and the background was white. He read the instructions and did what they said. He filled in his full name, his age, marital status and occupation. They requested his email in order to help him. He provided it and pressed send.

A new window opened and told him to head over to his mailbox. As soon as Mark pressed the link in their message to confirm that he was a member, the curse would be lifted and he would become immune to the demons. He checked his mail and saw that he had received a message from HobsWish. "**Conformation needed,"** it said, and he opened it. A link had been put in the message and he was urged to click it. When it was done, he would be safe. The voice in his head told him not to do it, that it was a trap. Mark told the voice to get lost. He didn't want to die. He clicked it.

A hideous face appeared on the screen. Eyes that seemed filled with blood stared at him malevolently. The thing on the screen had long black hair. The face was deathly white. It smiled at him and a voice that made Mark whimper spoke up from the speaker system.

"Thank you Mark, the deal has been made. Your soul is now mine."

What did he mean, "the deal has been made"? Mark hadn't made any deal.

"But you have, Mark. You should read all your messages properly. Had you done so, you would have seen the deal at the bottom of the message I sent you. I quote: 'By clicking this link, I agree to sell my soul to the devil in exchange for my life. When I die my soul shall travel to hell and report for duty.' You clicked the link, Mark," the devil said. Mark felt sick to his stomach.

"How was I to know?" he said.

"Now, don't feel bad, Mark. Thanks to this age of science, there is hardly anyone that believes in heaven or hell anymore. I, for one, think it is great because my soul collecting has become so much easier. Had you known your religion, you would have known that Old Nick and Hob are two of the many names I go by. I had a bet with Alastor that you would last longer, that you would understand what was going on. After all, you had written a story about Samael. I was so disappointed when you cracked. On the other hand, Alastor is good at what he does and he had help from the others. I will have to speak with my Lilith and ask her why she helped him. She was supposed to help me and she did at first. I guess her hunger for a soul got the better of her."

Lilith? But Mark had been so sure that she had been a human. Her name was so normal.

"Lilith? Normal? Let me tell you what her name means, Mark. It means Queen of the Demons. You see? Your ignorance speaks even through cyberspace. Pytho is the demon of lies; Balban is in charge of delusions. Together we make a good team, don't you think? I knew that you'd recognize Samael, so I sent him in to get you going, to make you hold on longer. You didn't. You were

already too close to the breaking point. I stepped in and pushed you the last bit myself. You didn't need much persuasion," the devil mocked.

Mark decided that he had had enough and turned off the screen. Nothing happened. The devil was still there and a smile played in the corner of his mouth.

"Mark, Mark, Mark. I am surprised at you. Do you really think I will disappear if you cut the power? Don't be stupid. Now, since you have made a deal I will throw in something extra for you. Let us call it a bonus, shall we? I will make you a famous writer for the rest of your life. You will make millions! But I will make sure that you will have no one to share it with. I will take the lives of those you hold dear, as well as the lives of those that befriend you. You will die alone but never be forgotten. And when you die, you will keep your end of the deal. Goodbye, Mark Delouise."

The screen went dark.

Mark sat staring at it for a long time. He couldn't believe what had just happened. The voice in his head spoke up and asked him if he was sure that anything had happened at all? No, he couldn't be dead sure of it. Still…

The phone rang and Mark jumped in his chair from the sudden sound. He hadn't realized just how tense he had been and smiled at himself. Of course nothing had happened; it had just been his brain coming up with a new story to write. Mark felt relieved and got up to answer the phone. The moment before he answered, he felt as stupid as hell.

"This is Mark speaking," he answered as usual.

"Uh, is this Mark Delouise? The writer of the short story *The 13th Step Into Hell*?"

"Yes, that's right. Who is this?" he asked, a little confused.

"Hi! My name is Bart Feelgood and I am the senior editor at Mythical Publishing. I am interested in your work. I was wondering if we could meet at my office tomorrow to discuss your future. There could be some money in it for you. You are just what we have been looking for."

The voice in the phone kept talking but Mark wasn't listening. His eyes had traveled to the dark computer screen. Inside his head he heard a mocking laughter and blood started to trickle down the inside of the screen once again.

Bones in the Branches

By
Amanda C. Davis

Once upon a time, there was a soldier.

Once upon a time, there were twelve daughters of a king.
Once upon a time, they met.
That's what makes a story.

* * *

The girls had a secret and the soldier had magic: a potent mix. The king, for his part, added rage. "The shoes! The shoes!" he shouted and dumped a box with twenty-four split-soled slippers at the soldier's feet. The girls pretended surprise. The soldier pretended to ponder. The king had nothing to pretend.

"Find out where my daughters go at night," he snarled, "and you can marry any one of them you like."

A king with so many princesses might be forgiven for sacrificing one to save eleven. If word got out that the princesses left their room every night – without explanation – well, people would invent explanations of their own, and the whole dozen of them would end up marrying penniless soldiers who still shook from the memories of war. Twelve kingly dowries to twelve poor men. His entire household would go to their graves ashamed.

The soldier studied the shoes, studied the daughters and said, "All right, I'll stand watch outside their door tonight."

Which is exactly what he did not do.

* * *

Beware a man with an invisibility cloak. He can slip into your chambers and stand among your sisters, leering at their bare backs, sniffing deep as they pass, brushing their hands with his, letting his fingers glide along their loosened hair. He can follow you through your secret door, down your hidden path, to the enchanted worlds below. He will lean against the glistening trees that grow so quickly they creak and scrape his arms. He will marvel at the bones in their branches. He will tread on your dress. His eyes will burn upon you, as you twelve join hands in the icy gazebo so far underground that it is bright as day; and he will slip unseen into your circle so that he may watch you dance.

* * *

Beware your invisibility cloak. It makes you think you are invisible.

* * *

Once upon a time, there were twelve princesses locked into their bedchamber every night until they taught themselves the magic to escape. Every night they danced together in a strange under-realm with a boy they hid in their closet, a boy from the kitchens or the docks or the gutters. Every day they lived as princesses and every night they danced like dervishes until their fine silk slippers worn through.

Where the boys' blood fell, it fed the glistening trees. A forest rose up and the bones dangled down.

One day their father, the key-bearer, the lock-turner, brought them a man with magic – brought him right to their

chamber door -- a firm man in body, a broken man in mind, with magic not quite as strong as he thought. The man followed them down and down to their dancing place, through the forest strewn with boys' bones. He stood in their circle. He grinned wide, that broken soldier, and just like all the boys before him, he joined in.

The soldier danced until his flesh wore away.

His blood fed a copse of rowan that surged under his skeleton and lifted his invisible bones to touch a twinkling sky.

And the princesses lived happily ever after.

The Fruits of No Labors

By
Canaan Frank

If Aesop meant for you to know the truth behind his fables, he would have told the story I'm about to tell. But Aesop wasn't so bold. He disguised the truth behind the masks of animals and never dared to delve into the reality. He thought it would be too horrifying for his audience. If you'd known the real fox that became enraged at the sour grapes after her efforts in vain, you would know Dalia Emerald Foxx and the very thing the grapes symbolized. The grapes themselves were Randall G. R. Ape, III, son and heir of a billionaire. But neither Foxx nor Ape are in my story. Theirs is a tale for another day.

I'd like to introduce you to a friend of mine -- and when I say friend, I'm making a stretch. He is the one sunbathing by the swimming hole, his large body, the creation of poor and gluttonous eating habits. His name is Greg Seville Hopper. He is unemployed and has been since the season changed to summer.

The lady you see passing on the path near G. S. Hopper is Sandra Ant. She is dressed in a starched business suit, sweat springing on her forehead. She is engaged in a business endeavour and barely notices Mr. Hopper. Hopper is eyeing her from his lawn lounger, sunglasses raised from his eyes.

"Oh, what a sight for sore eyes," he calls to her. He doesn't stand from his chair. The effort it would take would be far more than he wished to expend. "Beauty in a suit."

She wipes the sweat from her brow and tosses him a friendly wave. "Hi, Mr. Hopper," she calls.

"Why the suit?" he calls back.

"I've got a meeting with a client," she returns. Now she is very close to Mr. Hopper. She's moving at a brisk pace.

"But, dear lady," G. S. calls to her, "it is Saturday and a lovely day at that. The water is warm," he says, as if he attempted little more than placing his big toe into it.

Passing him now, she returns, "If I close this deal I'll be set for the hard winter months. They're saying it's going to be a harsh one."

"Nonsense," says G. S. He grunts in an effort to place himself on his side and keep S. Ant in his sight. "Life is too short to spend working. It is the good season to lounge and to take a dip – a skinny one, if you catch my meaning." He winked. In his mind, he imagined what was beneath that suit and wondered how it would look skimming on the water -- a lovely show for him while he watched from his lounge chair.

"As tempting as it is, I must decline." She is well beyond Hopper now. "I hope you're prepared, Mr. Hopper, for the harsh months ahead."

"Prepare, shleppare," he groans. "I'm prepared to enjoy my day."

"Enjoy," she calls back and hurries from shouting distance.

G. S. reaches for the beer beside his chair. Some people just don't know what enjoyment is, and enjoyment for him would be to see Ant in the buff.

* * *

Though the summer was warm and fun, it came with many hangovers and a lot of spending for G. S.

Hopper. By mid August he was broke and homeless, living by his favourite swimming hole. By late August, it was time to find work.

"Please, take a seat, Mr. Hopper," invited Ant, standing and pointing to the chair on the other side of her desk.

G. S. thanked her and took the seat.

"I see that you're looking for a secretarial job," Ant said, taking a seat herself.

"Yes, ma'am, I am," said Hopper. He attempted to look her in the eye, but was incapable. What little cleavage he could see beneath her suit and tie was enough to distract his attention. He wondered what it would be like to place his face between the lovely mounds.

"Do you have typing skills, Mr. Hopper?"

"Five," he said. "Yes, ma'am. Been practicing," he said, and as he attempted to reach her eyes with his gaze, he came up short. His eyes returned to her chest. "Five, might near six," he said. "Timed myself and I was two letters off of six before it hit a minute. Plan on hitting ten by month's end."

"Well, Mr. Hopper . . . this is a fast paced business. I work on a commission and when I close a deal, I get that commission. What holds a deal back is slowly prepared paperwork. Even if you worked your way to twenty words a minute, you would greatly hold me back. I'm sorry, but once you can type eighty, please come back and see me. I might have an opening."

"But," G. S. struggled. "I . . . uuuummmm . . . I need this job. I . . ."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hopper. This isn't personal and I wish you the best in your search for employment."

* * *

When September came to an end, Hopper was still unemployed, living beside his favourite swimming hole. The water had begun to ice, a thin layer, as the cold temperatures began to set in.

When December rolled around Sandra Ant was well prepared for the sub-zero temperatures. She found herself, dressed in a heavy jacket and three layers of sweatshirts, on her way to meet with Henry Sampler. If she closed the deal, her life would be easy street. She could even have the swimming pool built she'd always wanted.

When she passed the swimming hole, she noticed something different. G. S. Hopper didn't call out to her. He didn't gawk at her as he always had, lifting his sunglasses from his eyes and letting the drool flow. In fact, she didn't see him at all, not at first. But when she looked to his lounge, there was a trail in the snow as if somebody had dragged a large trash bag from it to the edge of the swimming hole – now iced over solid with several layers.

There he was, just a body at the ice's edge. Latched to his arm was the jaw of a hungry wolf tearing flesh from it. The carcass had been preserved by the cold. Mr. Hopper had died much thinner than he'd ever been in his life. She assumed he must have dropped several hundred pounds since she'd last seen him.

The wolf released his arm and snarled as he noticed Ant looking its way. It had found a meal and was in no mood to share.

Ant chose not to antagonize the wolf and hurried on. It was a pity about her friend, Mr. Hopper, and though she grieved for him, she knew that his fate was of his own doing.

The moral to this little story should be obvious, children. If you wish not to became wolf bate be prepared for the season.

Were-Spider's Bride

By
Ruth Imeson

There once was a woman named Judith who lived with her mother on the edge of a beautiful forest. The women farmed the most exquisite butterflies in the district and people came from far and wide to view and purchase the delicate creatures.

One day, when the moon was weeping through the morning sky, a troupe of were-spiders emerged from the forest and lay siege to the butterfly farm. The butterflies, being too young to fear the beasts, fluttered and flew in all their majesty. The were-spiders, being hungry from a long winter of near starvation, advanced on the butterflies and ate them all up.

The mother screamed and shouted to her daughter, "Go out and shoo away the nasty spiders!"

Judith was fearful, but, being a good daughter, did as her mother commanded. She went out to the spiders and begged them to stop the destruction of the butterflies.

"Shoo, nasty spiders! Go back to your webs and leave our charges to their brief lives."

The were-spiders circled Judith. They stood six-foot tall at the knee and their legs and bodies were thick with brown fur, which was matted with mud and butterfly entrails. The prince of the were-spiders opened its jaws and said, "Come with me and be my bride and we shall leave your butterflies be."

"No," said Judith, "that I will not do."

The were-spider nodded with the slightest tilt of his over-sized head. The spider to his left lashed out at Judith. She fell against the feeding trays. The spider ran toward her and pinned her to the ground with its two front legs. Judith screamed for the weight of the spider upon her chest was unbearable. The legs began to sink through her flesh.

The spider smiled a smile of terrible teeth then bit off Judith's right arm. She screamed and clasped her shoulder. The spider spun a suit of silk. He bound Judith's shoulder to staunch the blood, and then wrapped the amputated arm in silk before presenting it to his master.

"This will be returned to you," the were-spider said, "when you come to your senses and agree to be my bride."

The were-spiders turned and ambled slowly away from the farm.

A week later when the next batch of butterflies hatched, the were-spiders returned and ate up all the butterflies.

The mother screamed and shouted to her daughter, "Go out and shoo away the wicked spiders!"

Judith, still in pain from her missing arm, went outside and confronted the spiders. They circled her, but she stood her ground and admonished the spiders to return to the woods and leave the butterflies alone.

The spiders laughed at her and spun their webs around the farm to catch any butterflies that might attempt to escape from their clutches.

"Please leave our butterflies alone," Judith screamed. "They are such loving and attractive creatures."

The spider lowered his voice until it rasped. "Is your future husband not attractive?" His eight eyes swivelled in all directions and examined Judith's every muscle. "Run away with me and be my bride and we will let your butterflies be."

"No," Judith said, "I will not be a spider's bride! You have enough legs for four men and I wish to marry only one."

The leader of the were-spiders nodded at the creature to his right. The spider, which was sporting seven legs, with dishevelled fur and a bandaged eye, stepped forward and grabbed Judith by her left leg. He spun her around his head until her leg ripped free from its joint. Judith landed in the midst of the Dingy Skipper larvae and wiped out an entire species. Its subtle shades of browns and greys would never grace the world again.

The spider wrapped Judith's leg in silk and handed it to the prince, then sealed her wound.

The prince laughed to see such fun. "As you said, I have legs enough for us both. You shall have your leg back once you agree to be my bride." He turned on the spot and walked back to the forest. "We shall meet again, my bride." The other spiders followed the prince, jostling for position and the right to walk by his side.

The following week the were-spiders returned. Judith's mother called for her daughter to rid them of the spider threat once and for all. No human in the village would stand against such vicious creatures. The spiders spun their silk and rewove the web around the farm to capture any future butterflies. Judith went outside. The spiders had come at dusk. The wind swept through Judith's hair and the rain soaked her clothes. She hobbled along with a stick tucked under her remaining arm. She resolved to do what must be done for the good of the butterflies in her care.

"Good evening young lady," the prince of were-spiders said to her, "come and be my bride and we will desolate your farm no more." The spiders to the right and left of the prince stepped forward: saliva dripped from their fangs as they bent towards her.

"I will run away with you," Judith said, "if you leave this farm and never return."

"Then it is agreed," said the prince. He knelt down at her feet. "Climb upon my back and I shall carry you to my castle. There you shall become my bride and I shall restore your languid limbs." He nodded to his companions. "Destroy the web. I must keep my promise to my bride."

Judith climbed upon the were-spider's back and he set off for the forest. Her palm sweated and her back quivered with revulsion as she grasped the spider's fur and held on tight. It was rough with the smell of despair. Fearful as she was of her fate she did not wish to be trampled by the prince's many legs or those of his companions.

After a time the caravan of spiders reached an enormous rotting tree trunk that reached high into the forest's canopy. The prince climbed to his lodgings at the top of the tree and placed his bride in a hollow branch that had been prepared especially for her. The walls were decorated with the rotting corpses of a thousand butterflies.

"I will go gather our guests," said the prince. "Please brew me some ointment for my sore feet. You were a heavy burden to bear."

Judith fashioned a model of herself from discarded spider fur and limbs and set it to stir the ointment. She hid herself away under the bed. The prince returned with two hundred guests for their wedding ceremony. "Now that we are to be married, I will restore your limbs." When Judith did not answer, he prodded the model. When she still didn't respond, he kicked the model. The head rolled off and came to rest at the spider's feet. So distraught was he who had killed his bride that he threw himself from the top of the tree. Judith looked at her limbs that lay on the bed ready to be reattached. Without the spider's magic silk, she would

have to leave them behind. She hobbled from the room but saw the prince's servants running up the tree.

"Murderess," they shouted. "Dismember her. Rend her asunder."

So Judith jumped from the tree and landed in the splatter of her erstwhile prince. As she lay dying, she hoped that the were-spiders would forget her farm and that the butterflies would live again.

A Wonderful Musician

By
Robert Lee Frazier

There was once a wonderful, yet discouraged musician. He travelled through the forest feeling lonesome. He contemplated all manner of things, and when nothing was left for him to think about, he said to himself, "Time is beginning to pass heavily with me here in the forest, so I will find a good companion."

He then took his fiddle from his backpack and played. The music echoed through the trees. Soon a wolf came trotting through the thicket towards him.

"Here comes a wolf, but I have no need of his company," said the musician to himself.

The wolf came near and said to him, "Ah, dear musician, how beautifully you play. I would like to learn how to play, too."

"It is easy," said the musician. "All you have to do is follow my directions and do exactly as I tell you."

"Oh, musician," said the wolf, "I will obey you as a school boy obeys his teacher."

The musician told the wolf to follow him. After they walked together for some time, they came to an old oak tree that was hollow and a crack ran down the side.

"Look," said the musician, "if you want to learn to play the fiddle, put your forepaws into this crack."

The wolf obeyed. The musician picked up a stone and with one blow wedged the wolf's two paws in so tight he was now a prisoner.

"You wait there until I come back," said the musician as he wandered away.

After a while the Musician said to himself, "Time is beginning to pass heavily with me here in the forest. I will try to find another companion. He took up his fiddle and played it again. It was not long before a fox came creeping through the trees towards him.

"Ah, here comes a fox, but I have no need of his company," said the musician to himself.

The fox came near and said to him, "Ah, dear musician, how beautifully you play. I would like to learn how to play, too."

"It is easy," said the musician, "All you have to do is follow my directions and do exactly what I tell you."

"Oh, musician," said the fox, "I will obey you as a school boy obeys his teacher."

The musician told the fox to follow him. After they walked together for some time, they came to a footpath, with high brush on both sides. The musician bent a young hazel-bush down to the ground and put his foot on the end of it. Then he bent down a young tree from the other side as well and said, "Now little fox, if you will learn something, stand here upon the path."

The fox obeyed and the musician let go. The bushes sprang up again and jerked up the little fox so that it hung struggling in the air.

"Wait here until I come back again," said the musician as he wandered away.

Again he said to himself, "Time is beginning to pass heavily with me here in the forest. I will try to find another companion." So he took up his fiddle and the sound echoed

through the forest. Then a little rabbit came springing towards him.

"Ah, a rabbit is coming," said the musician. "But I have no need of his company."

"Dear musician," said the rabbit. "How beautifully you fiddle. I would like to learn how too."

"It is easy," said the musician, "All you have to do is follow my directions and do exactly as I tell you."

"Oh, musician," said the rabbit, "I will obey you as a school boy obeys his teacher."

The musician told the rabbit to follow him. After they walked together for some time, they came to an open space in the forest where stood a single aspen tree. The musician tied a long string round the little rabbit's neck, the other end of which he fastened to the tree.

"Now little rabbit, run twenty times around the tree," shouted the musician. The little rabbit jumped to obey. After it ran around twenty times, it had twisted the string twenty times round the trunk of the tree, and the little hare was caught. The rabbit pulled and tugged on the string, but it only made the string cut into its tender neck.

"You wait there until I come back," said the musician as he wandered away.

In the meantime, the wolf had pushed and pulled and bitten at the stone and had worked so long that he had set himself free. Full of anger and rage he hurried after the musician wanting to tear him to pieces. When the fox saw him running by he cried out

"Brother Wolf, help me. The musician has deceived me and left me here to die. The wolf drew down the little tree and the brush and freed the fox. Gratefully the fox followed the wolf in the hope of taking revenge on the musician. Then they found the tied-up rabbit, which they also rescued, and they all sought the enemy together.

The musician was playing his fiddle as he went on his way, and this time he was more fortunate. The sound reached the ears of a great shaggy man. Upon hearing the music, this giant seemed entranced. He picked up his great axe and came to listen to the music.

"At last, the right companion," said the musician. "I was seeking a human being, not a wild beast."

The musician played so beautifully the shaggy man stood still, bewitched, his mouth open without saying a word.

The musician's heart leaped with gladness. As he played, he saw the wolf, the fox, and the rabbit slink towards him out of the woods.

Suddenly he stopped playing and shouted out, "Friend, the creatures of this wood are coming to hurt me and stop my music!"

The shaggy man raised his glittering axe and placed himself before the musician, as if to say, "Whoso wishing to touch him beware. You he will have to deal with me."

When the great shaggy man saw it was the wolf, he knelt down before it and said simply, "Master."

Then the wolf spoke. "This man tricked us and tied us up and left us to die in the forest."

Angrily the shaggy man turned to the musician and bellowed. He smashed the fiddle with his axe and then hit the musician over the head with the flat side of the weapon, knocking him unconscious.

The shaggy man then dragged the musician back into the woods and the animals all followed. After they all walked together for some time the wolf spoke up. "This will do."

The shaggy man bound the musician to a tree. The wolf, then the fox, and finally the rabbit all took a turn beating the musician with sticks and slapping him with their paws as the shaggy man looked on menacingly. The

musician woke up screaming. When they had finished, they all stepped back and stared down at the musician. The wolf said, “Well, you wait here until we come back.”

After the animals and the shaggy man had wandered away together a long distance, they were amazed that they could still here the musician’s screams.

The Last Night of the Sandman

By
Stacy Bolli

I sit in my quiet and musty jail cell relishing my last conscious minutes before I will be put to death. My execution is scheduled to take place this evening. The people have decided I must die by lethal injection, and I will have to say I agree with their decision. I am a monster beyond any hope of rehabilitation.

I sit calmly with a pencil resting against my index finger and thumb, contemplating my next choice of words. I am recording the most profound night of my young life -- the night I spilled my first drop of blood; the night I became a killer.

* * *

It was an unremarkable evening in my home and I was about nine years old. My behaviour was quite innocent up to this time, but the seeds of malice had been planted with my birth; they just needed to germinate.

After an evening of intense squabbling with my younger sister, my mother ordered us to bed. Fed up with the screaming and tantrums, she threatened us with the wrath of the Sandman.

"What is the Sandman?" I scoffed at her ridiculous threat.

"He creeps into your room late at night and if you are not asleep, he sprinkles magic sand into your eyes." My mother whispered ominously. "If you are truly a bad child the sand will cause you to become blind!"

I laughed at the loony lady's weak threats, but retired to bed anyway with the tale of the Sandman on the forefront of my thoughts. I shared a room with my little sister and she was already tucked in her blankets with her teddy bear.

I lay awake and looked at her across the dark room. Suzie's eyes were heavy lidded as she teetered on the precipice of sleep. I truly loved my sister and would never let harm come to her.

"Good night, Suzie. I love you." I whispered to her and she smiled and cuddled her bear closer to her chest.

I lay awake for what seemed hours with my thoughts racing around in my head. My mind constantly played a slideshow of images. These images were taken from my head. I liked to draw and paint. Some of my creations disturbed my parents and they showed these offending pictures to the shrinks. The shrinks just shrugged and decided this was the most benign outlet for my emotions, so they left me to my vices.

It was at that moment I heard a rattle outside my window.

I sat up in bed and squinted into the darkness toward the alien noises. I was not afraid; I wanted to entice whatever creature was outside my window to come closer. I heard the window slide open and I ducked back down into my covers and feigned sleep. I slit my eyes just enough to see what was entering my room. I was surprised to see a squat little man with a burlap sack slung over his shoulder waddle into view.

This must be The Sandman! I thought with excitement.

He silently crept to my sister's bed and I held my breath; muscles tense, ready to attack if he hurt her. He placed a stubby hand on her forehead and gave her a most serene smile. The dwarf leaned over and gave her a soft kiss on the cheek. I saw Suzie's body relax and she smiled around her thumb.

I scrutinized the dwarf's approaching face as he turned to me and could see it was not very aged. His features were soft and quite pleasant to look at. He crept over to my bed and my mouth became wet with thin saliva. I let the drool drip to my pillow, not wanting to wipe it away and frighten the little man. I desperately wanted him to come close to me, maybe to give me a soft kiss.

I felt his presence approach me and my eyelids quivered under the strain to keep them shut. I felt his warm hand rest on my forehead and then heard him release a little sigh. His warm touch comforted me and I wanted to fall asleep, but I fought the urge. Then I felt a spray of sand pelt my face and my limbs acted in sudden defence. I shot out of bed, totally blind.

"What the hell! How dare you throw sand on me!" I screamed.

I heard his little footsteps patter to the left side of my room. I was blind but I had a concise photographic memory and did not need this sense to navigate around my room.

I reached behind the chair and swung my hand back and forth attempting to come into contact with anything. I felt a sharp bite on the top of my palm and felt another shower of sand thrown on my face. This assault just further angered me and caused me to fight harder.

I picked up the chair, threw it onto my bed and lunged into the corner where the little bastard would be

crouched. I grabbed nothing but empty air and toppled face first into the corner of the room.

At this point Suzie had woken up and shouted my name. "Shhhh…" I whispered to her. "There is a burglar in the room. Don't be afraid because he is very small, but he was trying to steal your teddy. Help me catch him!"

Suzie just whimpered in return. I heard the springs creak as she got off her bed and she placed her small hand in mine. She could be my eyes since I was blind at the moment. I handed her my metal baseball bat and told her to stay close to me.

"Do you see him?" I asked.

"No…wait! Under the bed I saw my blanket move." Suzie cried frantically shaking my hand.

I jumped to Suzie's bed and overturned it. I heard the scamp scuttle across the room.

"Swing the bat, Suzie! Hit him in the head!"

I heard a sharp whack and felt a sprinkle of warm liquid across my cheek. I whooped and pumped my fist into the air.

"He's not down, Bobby! He ran into the closet!" Suzie cried.

"Let me get him," I ordered. "Get into your bed Suzie!"

I walked over to the closet and I felt that the sliding wooden doors were shut. I heard rapid little pants from inside the closet and smiled. He was trapped and he was mine for the taking. I slowly opened one side of the closet and held the opposite door shut with my foot. I swished my arms back and forth and felt nothing but clothes. I dropped to my knees and felt around but shoes were the only thing I came in contact with. Then I heard a little sneeze and I immediately grabbed the midsection of the closet. The little scamp was hanging from the clothing rod. I pulled him

down immediately and pinned him to the closet floor. It was not difficult since the man was so small.

"Please," he begged me. "Take my sand." With a shaky hand, he placed the burlap sack into my palm.

I took the sack and was surprised by how heavy it was. I wondered how such a small man could carry such weight. I stood up and shut the closet doors using my body weight to keep them closed. My sight was beginning to come back and I peered in the bag and could make out little shimmers of light inside. I overturned the sack and heard the sand pour out onto the floor.

"What is it, Bobby?" I heard Suzie ask from behind her overturned bed.

"It is nothing, Suzie. I have him trapped in the closet and it is going to be ok."

I placed my finger to my lips indicating that she should be quiet. I opened the door to the closet once again and reached into the corner. I again felt a sharp bite as the dwarf tried to defend himself. I grabbed him by the scruff and threw him into the bag. I tied the top of the bag into a knot and the little guy fought furiously in the confines of the bag. I swung the bag over my head and into the opposite wall. I heard the bag hit the wall with a thump and a small cry escaped from within. I picked up the bag and hurled it again into the wall over my dresser. It thumped the wall and slid down into my empty clothes hamper. I walked over and peered in the hamper. Most of my sight had returned and I could see the bag was silent and still. I poked it with my finger and I could feel the mushiness of flesh and broken bones.

"Suzie, open the window!" I ordered.

Suzie obediently ran to the window and opened it wide and I felt the cool night breeze fill the room.

I dragged the hamper over to the window and hefted it up to rest on the windowsill. I lifted the bottom of the

hamper and let the burlap sack fall into the bushes below. I peered down and saw that the sack landed on top my of mom's favourite azaleas. I laughed; good serves her right, old hag.

I turned and hugged Suzie. "It is all over now. Let's go to sleep, partner." I placed her bed into the correct position and Suzie climbed right in. She smiled and hugged her Teddy close. I went to the bathroom and wiped the blood off my cheeks and crawled into my bed.

I remember waking up that morning and there was no sign of a struggle, just a pile of sand. I pushed the sand under my bed and threw a blanket on the remaining sand on my floor. I would vacuum it up after school.

Suzie was quiet but didn't seem too disturbed by our battle. She either dismissed it as a dream or chose to block it from memory. After breakfast I walked to school feeling a new life in the pit of my stomach, the germination had begun.

* * *

After the execution Suzie received her brother's ashes. She was instructed to spread them out along the sands of Canaveral Seashore. His journey will end where it started, in the sand.

Doc Hickory

By
Nate Burleigh

He pushed the wooden door to the side, tightened his leg muscles, and launched himself up the first flight of stairs. *One down, seventy-two to go*, he thought. The beat of his heart thumped against the sides of his neck as the exertion sped up his already racing pulse. He didn't have much time, so skipping two or three steps at once was imperative. He tried not to look at the torturous ascent that lay ahead and concentrated on one flight at a time. By landing ten, his legs and knees throbbed as if someone were shocking him over and over with a cattle prod. He knew that soon he wouldn't be able to feel them at all. He thought that wouldn't be such a bad thing.

As he rounded the flat of the eleventh landing, Doctor Randy Hickory looked at the bloody note in his hand. The crimson smears said, "Be at the top of Whetherby Clock Tower by one o'clock a.m., or she *dies*." The thought of losing her helped dull the pain in his legs. He looked up. The dim light of the moon shining through the plate glass windows gave silhouette to the mechanism high above. And, like the gears of the clock tower, his own mind clicked and whirred in an effort to make some sense of the obscure note in his hand. Why would anyone want to take Monica? And why would anyone hurt her?

* * *

He'd arrived home from his Emergency Room shift around 11:30 p.m. When he went to put the key in the lock, the front door swung open. He instantly froze, noticing several things out of place. Chairs in the dining room were overturned and his wife, Monica's, favorite glass vase lay in shattered pieces strewn across the kitchen floor. He'd cautiously opened the door anticipating the possibility that he may have to duck. It looked like she'd gotten into one of her moods. Lately things had been a bit strained between them and Monica had a wretched temper. She liked to throw things and slam doors. That was one of the reasons he'd insisted on moving into a studio; less doors to slam. Even though things were tense between them, he'd managed to smooth it over. They'd been attending marriage counseling and he even thought the "spark" in their relationship had returned.

Randy scanned the rest of the apartment, still waiting for his "Little Mouse" to pop up raving mad about something. He'd nicknamed Monica "Little Mouse" when they were dating. She was very dainty and the way her slightly pointed nose blended in with her cheeks and chin kind of made her look like a mouse. And with the name "Monica" to go with it, he had no choice but to call her his "Little Mouse." But he'd pointed out that she was the most beautiful mouse on earth. She'd given him some grief about it, but the nickname stuck.

Still, the eerie quietness about the house left his nerves humming like a swarm of honey bees. Then he noticed objects lying on the crystal coffee table in the living room area. One of the objects was a piece of notebook paper with what looked like children's paint smeared all over it. He knew they were words but quickly lost interest in what the note said when he saw what lay next to it. He couldn't quite wrap his mind around what the other two

items were. Then every single one of those bees of nerves froze in place. He felt blood drain from his face as he went pale with horror. His stomach lurched and he swallowed quickly to avoid spewing all over his leather sofa. A rusty pair of garden sheers had streaks of blood dripping from it, and next to it, with the wedding ring still in place, was his wife's finger.

His eyes were drawn to a bloody trail that led away from the living area. It spattered its way toward their bed in the far corner of the loft. The sheets were pulled back as if someone were preparing it for the evening. His knees shook as he stood and made his way to the bed. Trickles of blood crisscrossed over the white satin sheets and pillows. The trail led off the bed toward the bathroom. He knew this amount of blood loss wouldn't kill Monica, but the thought of her slaughtered body on the bathroom floor made his heart skip several beats.

The floor of the bathroom looked as clean as he'd left it that morning. His wife's hair-care articles and cosmetics dotted the marble counter. He looked up. Scrawled across the mirror in the same macabre penmanship as the note were the words: DON'T BE LATE!

* * *

"Nearly there now," he panted. It felt as if his heart and lungs were imploding and he slowed to a fast walk. Up a flight, turn left, up another flight, turn left. Then he came to a complete stop. He looked over the railing and could no longer see the entrance, but the innards of the clock tower didn't seem to be getting any closer. He felt as if somewhere in the middle he'd stopped gaining ground. His head spun and this time he did lose his lunch over the side of the railing. His mind calmed down when he heard a faint splattering sound from far below. His watch started to beep

and he knew he only had five minutes left to get to the top. He continued.

The apparatus started to get larger and he could hear a faint clicking noise from above. He rounded what he thought was the flight before the last landing, when the bell tolled one. He came to a complete halt and willed himself to take a breath. Would the sick bastard really kill her? "Don't do it!" he screamed into the darkness above. Then he heard a slow drum roll of thumps coming his direction. The object hit the landing in front of him, bounced off the wall, and continued to bump down the steps. Instinctively he stopped the object with his foot. When he realized what he'd stopped, his whole being crumbled.

Randy gazed into the emptiness of those deep-blue eyes, ones he knew well, but they weren't Monica's. His mind flashed back to the images in his apartment: the broken vase, the turned over chairs, the note. Then it all came together in his mind. The ring didn't fit the finger on the table. It sat just above the knuckle. He knew in that instant that it hadn't been Monica's finger.

Tears streamed down his face as he knelt next to the head of his girlfriend Lindsay; blood and sinew had matted her once snow white hair. He cradled her head in his lap like a child with a toy doll and closed her eyes.

He gently placed Lindsay's head on the step next to him, stood with angry conviction and started back up the last flight of stairs. Waiting on the landing in front of him, with hellfire burning in her eyes, was Monica; his little mouse. She ran down the last two steps and plunged the butcher knife deep into his throat. He remembered grabbing a handful of hair before he fell backwards, over the railing, into the darkness.

Gretel and then Hansel

By
Matt Athanasiou

Listen, my story has already begun, so hear how it still moves on.

Near a great forest, there once lived a poor woodcutter and his wife. They are dead now, have long since become dust.

A girl and boy, children of the deceased and much older than their appearances, live at the edge of the great forest, a land consumed by night. The sound of axe strokes is loud but the children recognize the trick of the wind; of rotted branches swinging on withered trees to and fro, of crunching leaves, of footsteps in the river, of those noises they have no answer for.

Gretel is the girl inside, handing the woodcutter another log for the stove. Upon his discovering the children, the man's first instructions were to gather wood for heat. Yellow flames, candles the woodcutter unpacked, flicker about the table. Gretel winces at the light; her eyes have grown accustomed to the night.

The woodcutter does not like her lips clenched against her teeth, does not enjoy those eyes that might roll out of her face. He has told her this, and those bronze strands on her balding head are not that of a child's. On her kirtle, he has commented that the crimson, tan and amber patches were sewn for a blind and deaf girl who cannot see or hear those ridiculing her for wearing such clothes. At

that, she shrugged her shoulder where the sleeve hangs loose. She must eat he said to this and patted his doughy chest. She will she told him, when there is food again for sup. Thank man's curiosity for exploring dark regions and losing his way.

Hansel is the boy outside the small house staring at the roof, the thick and noisy forest behind him. His cheeks are sunken further than his sister's, his tattered pants and vest dangle like rags, his frayed socks slump over his feet like wilted petals and red lines scar his unblinking eyes.

Gretel's skin pulls tighter against her teeth. She cried the eve her father and stepmother spoke of losing Hansel and her in the forest. The family was much too poor to feed four mouths, and why should the stepmother have to suffer these children? Hansel said he would manage a plan, but he was talking like a goose, and he acted like a goose when they were led into the woods. He often turned back to the house and confused the chimney pot for his white kitten and white pigeon. It seemed like part of his plan, but long ago, their father killed those animals for dinner. Gretel and their father roped Hansel to the chair, forced him to eat what the rest readily stuffed in their maws. Their stepmother said Hansel could starve if he pleased.

"You are foolish children for having the stove unlit," the woodcutter says.

Gretel startles and drops the final piece of wood between them. It rolls against his toe. Somewhere her stepmother calls her lazy bones. "No food," Gretel says. "It is not so cold." She watches him rub his palms together and blow on those meaty paws.

It has always been Gretel who managed. She never flinched when red stained her hands. The woodcutter must not have heard their story whispered among the leaves,

uttered near the distant moulding rubble where the corpse's teeth and ribs continue smoking.

The woodcutter takes up the log, turns it over while glancing at her, then places it atop the others. He jiggles them and ashes puff from the stove. A raw breeze opens and closes de-louvered shutters and cabinets rocking the teeth-marked spoons on the table.

Sweat shivers on the woodcutter's cheeks. "Fetch the fowl from my pack. There shall be heat in a moment. Then the frost shall melt from your heads." He looks through the door at Hansel. "And I'll remind you of your hunger and need of warmth. You must care for yourselves or things shall be worse for you."

Gretel blinks at him and shifts a bony shoulder. There is no need for a reminder. There is no need for things to be worse.

She walks around the table toward the bag and shakes her head at Hansel. He owes his life to her, and their eternal starvation and their eternal darkness. When they came across the witch's house of sweets, they could not resist eating the roof of cakes, could not resist licking windows of sugar. Hunger has been the heart of their troubles, as it is with men who desire.

The witch was so merry about catching two children, two living meals that she boasted for weeks while Gretel was forced to prepare the best kinds of victuals for Hansel to fatten him up. The witch's arrogance soon bested her cleverness, and she stuck her head in the stove and told Gretel her brother would kick like the dickens. Gretel stepped back from the cooking pot to cease her own violent thoughts. This old woman kept Gretel fed, although with crab shells; kept her warm, although she slept on the floor; and spoke with her in the kitchen, although about consuming children and seducing animals, men and women. She was more of a caretaker than Gretel's

stepmother, more of a caretaker than the mother she and Hansel never met. She wondered if the witch was their birth mother who had lost her way.

The woodcutter shifts the wood some. Only one thick arm fits in the stove.

Gretel squeezes the bag.

Back then that witch thrashed worse than the dickens, pounding out the sides of the stove after Gretel shoved her in and locked the latch. Purple and black flames wrapped around the bars of the oven door and up the breaded chimney. No kind mother, witch mother or other, would leave them with their father's wife until they were old enough to make their way into a cooking pot.

When Gretel freed her round brother from his dark hole, he explained that he survived by holding out a chicken bone whenever the witch checked his finger for plumpness; she would not eat a scanty meal. He had not completely lost his mind, not from his parents forsaking him, not from his parents skinning and cooking his pets, not from a witch preparing him for dinner. As their parents discussed abandoning them in the forest, he had not thought like a goose while he gathered flint stones to set a trail leading back home; Gretel was the one to suggest dropping a path of breadcrumbs, which the animals ate.

Gretel grabbed Hansel's arm to pull him out and her lips wetted at the want of meat — her meals of shells had broken her teeth and had scraped her throat and tongue, but her teeth were jagged enough to tear through flesh.

They could have run out then, left the place to crumble into sticky-sweet ruins, but Hansel noticed a sparkling chest in the corner. He also said they should hurry away; the place was not right. Gretel's mouth, burning with cuts, her fingers raw from always cooking, she gathered the pearls and precious stones and jewels that did not gleam as they ran home. The white duck that helped

them cross the lake was another warning. They could cross the water together, brother and sister, or separately, each bearing riches. The treasure, inheritance from their witch mother, was supposed to feed them. How could they discard it in the forest for another?

"Brother," Gretel calls and pulls out the dead bird by the neck. The woodcutter glances over his shoulder and then turns back to the fire. Smoke rises around his shoulders. She calls for Hansel again and strikes the fowl against the table, then she is tapped on the shoulder. The long knife shakes in his feeble grip. His eyes quiver at the sight of the bird. Orange liquid dribbles from a rosy sore over his lip. She undoes the hatchet from the woodcutter's pack. It is nicked, like her teeth, but it will manage, like her teeth. Gretel always manages, as she did when they arrived home to find their father with the blade Hansel now grasps.

Their stepmother's arms were crossed on the table. Her head rested over them as though she slept. Red puddled between her feet. The knife bounced off the chair and hit the floor as Gretel met her father's stare. Hansel said he would manage, and Gretel hugged her father. They brought out the treasures and said they would live like royalty, but as soon as the pearls and precious stones touched the table and their father's hands, they became pebbles and stale bread.

Ravens swarmed the treetops and blackened the sky. Their caws blew away over the mountains and their fluttering silenced. Gretel and Hansel's father wept. He said their stepmother had eaten the remaining rations in a fit. He cut her throat in a tussle to wrestle the knife from her.

The hatchet bobs in Gretel's grasp at this thought. Hansel does not know the weapon he holds was the one she used to stab their sleeping father. He did not ask about the spatter on her dress when she told him a robber had come in the night, and upon finding spoiled bread, fell into a rage

and killed their father. Hansel did, however, talk much less after she convinced him to eat their father. By then, they had both been mostly bones. They dug up their stepmother's grave for food but found dust. The curse must have hastened her decay, or someone had unburied her, or she had unburied herself and was ambling through the woods. There are many stories about her fate, stories not meant for this tale.

"Come now. We must eat," the woodcutter says, bending over the fire in much the same way the witch did; if his shoulders were not so brawny, Gretel could give him the same treatment.

She hides the hatchet behind herself and hands him the fowl. He immediately sets to depluming it, dropping the feathers on the floor, and says her brother and her might forget their arms and legs if they do not take care to remember them. They must remember their hunger.

The feathers twirl. They dip and rise as if unwilling to settle until they lose all zeal. Gretel taps the hatchet against the back of her leg. This man is about to feed them, about to portion out his meal. It will not be enough to fill them, but he is willing.

Gretel's grip tightens on the hatchet. A well-placed hack and they will have food for weeks. The rocks in their guts will break away. Colour will return to their gray skin. They might gain strength to wander further into the woods and look for a path out.

The woodsman rips and rips the feathers away, and Gretel hears him say, "Rue-ha. Rue-ha."

The children have walked these sable lands for ages. There is no leaving.

Another feather descends on the pile and the woodcutter's mouth opens with a smack. His nose and eyes wrinkle. He takes three heavy steps around and faces

Hansel. The long knife is buried to the hilt in the woodcutter's back.

Gretel glances at the feathers once more. They quiver in the wind but remain grounded. The bird is dead and the feathers can no longer hide its ugly body underneath. They must understand this.

Gretel winds both hands around the hatchet. She does not know where the strength comes from to fell the man, but the snarling and biting in her gut seems like a good place to begin searching.

Hush everyone,
My story is still undone.
And look! A *man lies here,*
Weak and weary and with much fear.
She that can still him before he crawls out,
May have first bite of his large and meaty snout.

Mary

By
Eirik Gumeny

Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb; Mary had a little lamb, a side of potatoes, a salad, and just a hint of OCD. She was pretty, she was sweet and she always tipped generously. The hostess smiled as she sat her; the waiter was nearly beside himself to take her order. Mary was a living, breathing greeting card.

And everywhere that Mary went, Mary went, Mary went; everywhere that Mary went, Clem was sure to go. He ran a hunting supply store near the edge of town and had been infatuated with Mary for the past few months, ever since he had helped her change a flat tire. Most people regarded Clem with the same disdain they had served his alcoholic, racist father -- though Clem was little like the man. With the old hunters dying off and the small town he grew up in quickly becoming a city, Clem found he had few customers left to defend him. But Mary, Mary was nice to him. Mary was kind. She had smiled at him, laughed, and seemed genuinely thankful for his presence. It wasn't a reaction Clem was used to and his uneasiness was readily apparent to Mary. She had just laughed it off, kissing him on the cheek before driving away. Ever since, Clem, not having much else to do, had a tendency to follow Mary around if he got bored or especially lonely.

Mary had long ago, long ago, long ago; Mary had long ago written off Clem as harmless. He was polite, if awkward, maybe a little slow sometimes, and it was not like Mary wasn't accustomed to men chasing after her. As Mary left the restaurant that day, Clem grinned, waved and started following right behind her, asking how her meal was and if she was busy later that night. Mary said the lamb was pretty good but the potatoes were cold, and while she'd love to stay and chat, she was meeting her boyfriend in half an hour and needed to get changed. Clem didn't take too kindly to this information and grabbed Mary by the shoulder. He said that no real man would leave a woman as beautiful and fragile as Mary to fend for her own dinner in a town as rife with people and potential rapists and death as this one was anyhow. Mary managed a half smile and some mild amusement before saying goodbye to Clem and walking off.

Clem followed her back home that day, back home that day, back home that day; Clem followed her back home that day, which was against the rules.

Clem watched as Mary laughed and played, laughed and played, laughed and played; Clem watched as Mary laughed and played, through the window of her home. He saw Mary in a way he never had before with the man who was not him. Clem shook his head and closed his eyes, because Mary was sweet and not vile, and Mary was his friend and not this other man's. Clem calmed his mind and opened his eyes, but still Mary was undressed and on her knees -- only now she was looking directly at him.

And then the boyfriend turned to shout, turned to shout, turned to shout; and then the boyfriend turned to shout, but still Clem lingered near. The man sprinted outside, grabbing Clem by the neck and throwing him to the ground. He cursed, spat and raised his fist. Clem saw the fire in the man's eyes and had no other choice but to

stab the man in his neck and now, now, things weren't looking quite so much like sunshine and daisies for Mary anymore.

Clem waited patiently about, patiently about, patiently about; Clem waited patiently about until Mary did appear. Clem leapt from the front steps, placing his hand over Mary's mouth and pushing her against the doorjamb. He whispered gently that it was all right, that he would not hurt her, no, that he was here to protect her. In hushed tones and soft words, Clem explained to Mary how the sudden and surprisingly messy demise of her boyfriend revealed to him that life was short and even the most rational and calm person could be overcome by violent, homicidal urges at any given moment for almost no reason at all. The world, he explained, was simply a violent and horrible place and one must always be on the defensive. “And for you to allow yourself to get that close to a man that evil,” Clem said, “Well, that just proves that you need my help.”

Mary scratched and kicked, scratched and kicked, scratched and kicked; Mary scratched and kicked and then Mary ran. Mary ran and screamed and Clem was sure to follow. Mary ran through the rain that had begun to fall, trying to make it to her neighbour’s across the street, only to slip on the curb and fall to the street. Clem lifted her up and covered her mouth again, telling her there was no reason to shout. He pointed to the abandoned sidewalks and the lack of people about, proclaiming this to be just another sign of mankind's cowardice, everybody panicking and fleeing from a little rain. Still Mary fought against him and Clem shook his head. “Maybe,” he said. “Maybe I was wrong about you, Mary. Maybe you're not so nice, not as special as I thought.” And then Clem reached for the hunting knife he kept attached to his belt, only to find an empty leather sheath. Clem looked Mary in the eyes and then doubled over, coughing up blood.

Mary laughed and smiled, laughed and smiled, laughed and smiled; Mary laughed and smiled and wiped her hands off on her dress.

The Three Wittle Brothers

By
Francis W. Alexander

As winter approached, danger stalked with more frequency. The angrier Treyvon Wittle got, the harder he worked on his brick house. The sound of his stomach growling reminded him that getting food was the next item on his agenda.

His brothers, Tom and Chuck, often repeated the saying that blood was thicker than water. But when they found out about him, the concept dissipated like steam rising from a vent into the chilled air.

Now it was known that after their father died, their mother met an unlikely suitor who left shortly before Treyvon was born. The rumours had languished for nearly twenty years, but it wasn't until they heard their mother's deathbed profession revealing the fact that he was not of their kind, that they changed their attitude towards him.

"The winters aren't that bad," Chuck had said as if it were a broken record, "that you have to build a brick house." The two evil stepbrothers laughed and pointed whenever they passed by his abode in a rented horse and buggy. They were merciful -- letting him stay until this winter passed. They lived one mile away from him and it was too close for their comfort, although they lived nearly a quarter mile apart.

When they had heard the rumours of strange wolves roaming the area, the three men decided to build new homes. Tom and Chuck helped each other and mocked their younger brother as he worked diligently on his project.

He put the finishing touches on the house as dawn greeted the full moon. The sound of horse and wagon snatched his attention.

"You wasted your time," Tom said with a smirk on his face, a shotgun in his hand, "building a brick house when you know you'll have to move out as the first bud pops open."

He said nothing as his brothers climbed down from the buggy. Their presence only made him work harder to finish his task. Feeling their stares spearing his back like pins, he ignored them and stepped back to observe his masterpiece in the moonlight.

"Just remember," Chuck chuckled, "you're out of here at the first hint of spring. And if you think you can hold out in that brick house against us, think twice. We have friends who will help us rid this area of you." Their feet crunching leafs was hint that they were leaving. They got into the rented wagon and off they went.

He sighed, satisfied at his work. "I'll go into the woods and get those wild day lilies." He lit a lantern and headed for the woods.

Leaves lie on the ground displaying Mother Nature's artwork as he walked past two tall trees and into the clearing where the lilies grew. As he stooped to dig the plants out by the roots, he heard a twig snap. He turned in the direction of the noise expecting to see his brothers.

Black and tall, it stood on two feet like a bear, but it had the appearance of a wolf. Saliva dripping from its mouth, it stared at him.

Treyvon had never heard of a wolf doing what he was witnessing. Fear streaked throughout his body; horror massaged his mind. He looked around for a branch, was ready to do battle. When the wolf took a step towards him, the flight reflex took over. Knowing it wasn't an ordinary wolf, ideas shot at him like shards of a disco mirror. Then it hit him. "This is a werewolf!"

If you speak," he said, half-stuttering, "I want to make a deal with you."

"You're not," the werewolf said, "in a position to make deals."

"But I am," Treyvon smiled nervously and lied. "If you eat me, my brothers will find and kill you."

"How so?"

Treyvon dug into his pocket and retrieved a vitamin tablet.

"This," he said, "is a modern marvel of man. When I swallow it, a substance will be in all parts of my body. So if you eat me, then they will know how to find you because this substance will be in you too."

He popped the pill in his mouth and swallowed it, relieved that it didn't get stuck in his throat.

"Ingenious," the werewolf smiled and rubbed his hairy chin. But he was hungry, the lust was too strong.

He started to move towards Treyvon.

"I," Treyvon said, "have a proposition for you."

"Yes. Go on."

"If you only bite me, give me your immortality, some of this substance might be in you. But no one will know because I will show you to my brothers' houses. Besides, they have more meat on their bones than I do. And since they're the only ones who'll know, you can eat and store their carcasses for the winter."

"Hmmmm," the werewolf rubbed his chin. "I'm beginning to like you. You are very smart. Deal."

Man and werewolf stepped up to each other, hand shaking paw. Treyvon was pleased. Terror and pain gripped him as the werewolf sank shiny white fangs into his shoulder.

* * *

Although the werewolf had made him lose a good amount of blood, Treyvon was surprised he didn't feel faint.

After jogging through a half mile of woods and plain, he pointed the way to Chuck's castle, then took off through the woods, ran a short distance, turned and hid behind a tree to observe the action.

It was like a crow alighting on the scarecrow's shoulder -- his brother, Chuck's straw fortress made from shredded wheat. The werewolf grinned as he tore into the house. The tumbling straws temporarily blinded the monster as his meal escaped through a hidden door and took off for Tom's mighty stick house.

As the wolf untangled himself from the straws, Treyvon walked up to him and pointed.

"Follow the scent," he said. "That's the way to my brother, Tom's house."

The werewolf lifted his muscular chest and glared.

"That'll be two carcasses for the winter," Treyvon said. He watched as the beast took off in his brother's direction. Giving the werewolf some distance, he followed. Amazed at the strength of the moon's light, he arrived sooner than expected and was greeted by sounds of the werewolf baying at the moon.

"You won't escape this time," the werewolf said, walking around the place. Its stomach growled in between howls.

Smoke rose from the chimney and the aroma of hickory-smoked bacon wafted in the air. Treyvon knew his brothers felt safe, and he knew they were good runners.

The moon displayed its grey face and blue acne scars as the werewolf began his assault. Huffing and puffing, he moved like a bulldozer in a building headed for the door. The door bent but didn't break as the force of the collision knocked the beast to the ground. The door opened. Both brothers pointed shotguns and fired point blank into the beast. Stunned, they stood and watched as the werewolf rose and dusted himself off.

They closed the door. As the monster gave himself distance for the final blow, the sound of furniture being moved gave hint that they were positioning objects in front of the door.

Treyvon watched the side of the house, saw his brothers open the escape door and crawl out.

The werewolf's speed accelerated towards the house with its shoulder as a possible battering ram. As the beast slammed into the door, the two men headed in Treyvon's direction. He turned and took off for home.

* * *

"Who's afraid," Tom laughed, "of the big bad wolf!"

"He got quite a surprise," Chuck said, "when those logs fell on his head."

"I bet!" Treyvon's eyes gleamed.

"Thanks for letting us stay," Tom fleered.

This new form of politeness didn't fool him. Treyvon could sense the motives, and he also felt the effects of the full moon which was about to blossom as the sun lowered the top of her forehead beneath the horizon.

"Thanks," Treyvon grinned, "for coming. It's almost time to eat." He walked to the cabinet and retrieved some gruel. He could sense his brothers' revulsion, knew they not only hated him, but his gruel as well.

"Why didn't," Tom asked, "you get some meat before nightfall?" After last night's episode, the men lay on his two beds, as Treyvon cooked, then cleaned the dishes. Today, as he chopped wood outside, neither of them offered help.

"Why'd you make one room into a small ice skating rink?" Chuck asked. "You could've put some food in there and had a good meal for us tonight."

"I'm going," Treyvon said, "to have a good meal tonight. And that's a combination skating rink and refrigerator."

"A skating rink," Tom said, "when you won't be here long." The stepbrothers laughed.

The sound of howling whipped around the outside of the house. The men shivered as the noise got closer to the door.

"Don't worry," Treyvon said, feeling the hair on his body grow. "He can't get in here."

The thud of something hitting the brick house snatched Chuck and Tom's attentions. They stared at the door, missing the sight of the thing growing in their mist.

Lusting and hungry, Treyvon's howls matched the werewolf's decibel for decibel.

Tom, the first to see him, rose and sprinted to the wall. The young werewolf was on him, tearing into his neck and face, blood spurting on the walls.

A chorus of screams, howls, and thumps gave the air the festive Halloween feel. Chuck dove for the bed, tried to crawl under it.

Treyvon's teeth crunched bone. He threw Tom against the wall, stalked over, and reached under the bed.

Grabbing Chuck's foot, he yanked the screaming man from under the bed, dove, and tore into the stomach and watched as the intestines popped out.

Holding Chuck by the neck, the young werewolf walked over and grabbed Tom's body. He carried them to his freezer and tossed the bodies inside. He listened as the werewolf's howls grew weaker. Tomorrow night, he planned on taking on this former titan and adding him to the freezer.

"I'll be set for winter." He smiled, rubbed his stomach, and then burped.

The Red Shoes

By
A. E. Churchyard

Tap, Tap, Tap, Tapetty Tap…

Tap, Tap, Tap, Tapetty Tap…

The noise woke me from a sound, warm sleep and a shiver ran down my back. "It can't be." I whispered.

"Can't be what, Karen?" Andrew asked.

"Nothing, Drew, just a bad dream," I told him turning over to cuddle up and try to get back to sleep. He nodded and wriggled closer to me.

I was almost asleep again when I heard the tapping again, like someone dancing on a sheet of glass. It kept me awake until dawn.

"Why are you so clumsy today, Karen?" Danny asked as I entered the office, knocking over three piles of papers and a waste paper bin with my crutches.

"I didn't get much sleep last night." I sighed as I dropped into the cushioned chair at my desk and put the crutches into the umbrella stand.

"You look like it, darling. I'll get my Touché Éclat out." Danny rummaged in his bag dumping various products onto his desk.

I would have laughed if I hadn't been so tired. Danny thought that makeup could cover everything. I glanced down at my sneakers and wished that it could.

Between strong coffee and pastries that Danny had brought in, I woke up enough to clear my in-tray. Early afternoon the snow started falling again and as the weak winter light began to fade, the Christmas lights came on. I looked out the window and smiled at the carol singers on the street corner.

"You coming to the Company Carol Service tonight?" Danny asked as he touched up his mascara.

"Yup. Drew is meeting me in the square afterwards and we're going to the ballet. He got the tickets as a surprise." I stretched.

"Mmm. You grabbed yourself a hunk there sweetie. Andrew Piper is HOT!" My colleague rolled his eyes on the last word and I laughed at the exaggeration. "There now, that's more like the Karen I know. Here, let me adjust your make up so you won't show me up."

* * *

At five thirty, we pulled on our coats and scarves, trooped down through the building and out into the chill. The snow had stopped and everyone was laughing and chatting as we walked the short distance from the offices to the Cathedral.

The mood seemed to change as the others went up the front steps becoming more serious and thoughtful. I hesitated at the bottom.

"What's wrong, Karen? Worried you'll slip?" Danny asked.

"No, there's no ice. It's just that I haven't been into a church since I was a child." I stared up at the brightly lit door wondering what I would find at the top.

"Ah. I'll help you." Danny linked one arm though mine and we started up the steps.

Tap, Tap, Tap, Tapetty Tap…
Tap, Tap, Tap, Tapetty Tap…

I froze half way up. "Danny, can you hear that?" I asked urgently.

"Hear what, sweetie?" Danny frowned at me. "I can't hear anything."

"I can't go up there, Danny. Let me go back down. Make my apologies for me." I was having a hard time keeping the panic out of my voice. My limbs seized with fear.

Danny sensed it, "Darling, this is me you're talking to. What's wrong? If you don't want to go, I'll come with you, take you somewhere for a coffee."

I'd known Danny since we'd graduated and come to work for the company together. If there was anyone I could trust, it was him, "Ok. Let's go."

"Good girl." Danny turned me round and helped me back down the steps to the square.

I looked back up at the Cathedral. They were there, standing on the top of the steps. It felt like they were staring at me. I shuddered as they started dancing again.

Tap, Tap, Tap, Tapetty Tap…
Tap, Tap, Tap, Tapetty Tap…

"Come on then. Spill." Danny said as we snuggled into the deep leather armchairs in our favourite coffee shop.

"What do you mean?" The warmth of the mug in my hands and the comfort of the chair around me lulled me into almost forgetting what had happened.

He rolled his eyes and snorted "Daft woman. You had a panic attack half way up the steps of the cathedral, and then you ask me if I can hear anything. What was that all about?"

"Something happened to me when I was a kid. Churches of any sort tend to make me freeze up." I sipped my favourite cinnamon chocolate.

"Is it to do with the reason that you have false feet?"

I choked as hot chocolate shot up my nose, "What makes you think that?"

"I'm not sure. Come on Karen I've known you for a while now and I've never seen you freeze up like that."

As I debated if I should tell him or not, I glanced out of the window. The street outside was full of last minute shoppers hurrying backward and forward through the falling snow. There in the middle of the street stood my feet.

"Danny," I whispered, "can you see them?"

Danny frowned. "See what? Where?"

I pointed out the window at the disembodied feet clad in bright red patent leather ballet pumps. The toes were tapping to unheard music.

"Are you sure you're okay, Karen? I can't see anything but people and snow." Danny sighed. "I think you had better go home. I'll call Drew to pick you up."

Maybe he can't see them because he doesn't know? My guardian saw them before she died, I thought shivering slightly, "No, don't do that. I'll tell you what happened, then maybe you'll be able to see them too."

Danny looked at me strangely. I ploughed on before he could stop me.

"When I was six, my mother died. We were poor and I ended up in foster care. I was finally adopted when I was twelve by a rich old lady. She gave me everything I could have ever wanted." I sipped my chocolate.

"Sounds like heaven." Danny offered me a plate of chocolate chip cookies.

I shook my head, "No thanks. I need to get this out. It was heaven. I had everything, but I was never satisfied.

"The one thing that my Guardian insisted on was that I attended church. I hated it. It was boring, lonely and full of old people. When I was fourteen, my guardian insisted that I be confirmed.

"I went on a boring course with about five other kids. It felt like a waste of time really; I'd stopped believing in God when my mother died. We all passed, of course, and my guardian bought me a white lace dress. She let me pick out some new shoes. I was supposed to have white, black or brown shoes, but there was a pair of bright red ballet pumps in the window. They shone in the lights and even sparkled a little bit. I was entranced."

Danny sighed. "This is starting to sound like that old fairy tale about the red shoes that made the little girl dance until she had her feet chopped off and repented her sins."

I shivered, "You might say that. Pretty much everything that happened to her happened to me. However, I was honest with my guardian about what was happening and she had my feet removed a little more humanely than by axe. Apparently I even kicked the surgeon while I was under anaesthetic."

Danny stared at me and looked down at my false feet, "You mean to say it was just like the fairy tale?" he giggled. "You had to have your feet removed to stop you dancing?"

"It was the scariest thing! They put my feet in a see-through box and studied them. I was just glad to see them go. You have no idea how exhausted a human can get until you have danced for seven days straight, in all weathers and conditions." I glared at him.

"I had a normal life after that. The medical people who were studying my feet had them incinerated when the

flesh started to decay, despite their best efforts." I hauled myself up on one crutch. "Look if you're not going to believe me, I'm going to go home."

"I didn't say that I didn't believe you. And anyway, what about your date with Drew?" Danny glanced out the window, "Oh… my…God!"

I looked out again. There they were, glowing slightly, in the middle of the street.

"The old man that cursed me at the church said that I would never be free of them until either I repented or died." I closed my eyes against the tears that had welled up.

"Are they there all the time?" Danny asked fascinated by the way that the feet would do a little step shuffle every few minutes.

"They used to be. Now they only appear at Christmas, Easter and when I am invited to a wedding or christening. I can't go anywhere near a church without them being there." I sank down into my chair again.

"So what are you going to do? If you can't go to church, you can't repent."

"I don't know. I'm fed up with them being there, and Drew is starting to talk about church weddings." I used a serviette to wipe my eyes and glanced at my watch. "I'd better go and meet him."

"I'll walk you over there." Danny helped me into my coat and we went out into the square.

* * *

That evening felt magical. Drew and I had a wonderful meal, the ballet was spectacular and I didn't see my feet once. The fact that Danny believed me made me feel as if I had set aside a massive burden. I felt free to talk and laugh.

"It looks like the carol service did you some good," Drew said as we drove home.

"I didn't go. Danny and I went for a coffee instead." I told him.

"Oh?" he didn't look up from the road, but his tone of voice made it clear what he was feeling.

"Danny is the gay guy that you met at the Christmas party last week."

"What? that really camp blonde one?"

I giggled and he turned his head to grin at me. As he did so, I saw my feet standing in the middle of the road. I froze.

"What's wrong?" Drew looked back into the road "Bloody hell!"

Jamming both feet onto the brakes, he slid to a stop just in front of an old man with a bright red beard. The feet stood beside the old man, tapping slightly to an unheard beat.

"What on earth do you think you're playing at?" Drew roared at the old man. I looked on as my fiancé got out of the car. The sight of that long red beard waving luxuriously as the old man roared with silent laughter glued me to my seat. The feet pitter-pattered around the two men, the sound freezing me to my marrow.

"Such a beautiful lady at your side, such a pity she has become disabled," The old man said to Drew looking directly at me.

"What makes you think you can just stand in the middle of the road like that?" Drew ignored the comment in favour of making himself heard, "I only just avoided hitting you!"

"Miss Karen, hear me. Repent of your sins or suffer!" the old man said. "You have one night to repent before I collect you."

"Do not threaten my fiancée!" Drew cleared enough space and threw a punch at the man. It never connected.

As the old man faded, the feet tap-danced around Drew and the car before dancing away into the night.

As soon as we got home, I cuddled into Drew, drawing strength from his warmth. Drew locked all the windows and checked the doors before turning to me.

"What was that all about?"

I didn't answer as I sat down on our bed, dropping the crutches to the floor beside it.

"Karen. That old man knew you." Drew tipped my face up to look at him, "What was he talking about?"

"I don't know. I've never seen him in my whole life." I lied, not wanting to tell Drew what I had told Danny.

"He knew you were disabled. He knew your name. Come on sweetheart, tell me."

"I'm telling you, I've never seen him before. Don't you believe me?" I dropped onto my side on the bed.

"Karen if you want us to get married and start our life together properly, you can't keep secrets from me." Drew moved back from the bed.

"You don't believe me! How can you? I thought you loved me." I felt the tears dropping onto my pillow and turned over, putting my back to him.

"I do love you." Drew stared down at me; I could feel his eyes on my back. Then I heard him leave the room and slam the bedroom door. Moments later the front door opened and shut abruptly.

As I dozed off an hour later; I heard the noise of the front door going again. I sighed happily, thinking that Drew had come back and went to sleep.

Tap, Tap, Tap, Tapetty Tap…
Tap, Tap, Tap, Tapetty Tap…

The noise wasn't outside like last time. Rubbing sleep from my eyes, I looked around the room. There was nothing in the room so I turned over and tried to cuddle up to Drew. When my hand encountered empty space, I shot bolt upright. *Where's Drew? What time is it?*

It had sounded like it was in the kitchen; I sat up and pulled my robe on. Using the handrail, I pulled myself along to the head of the stairs. I could hear the noise of the feet dancing on the tiles, but there was another noise that sounded like laughter.

I slid down the stairs silently, along the hall, up to the kitchen door and peered in through the glass panel.

Redbeard sat on the table, smoking a pipe and laughing at Drew who danced around him. As he turned around the corner of the table, I saw blood draining from his eye sockets. Those beautiful green eyes that caressed me each morning as I awoke were rolling around a glass bowl beside Redbeard. I closed my eyes.

"Come in, Lass. Stand not outside the door," the old man called.

Reluctantly I entered the room. Drew danced around the table again, my red shoes on his feet. His hands dripped blood, a slippery red circle marking where he'd been.

"What have you done to him?" At the sound of my voice, Drew turned his head towards me.

"Kareggn…" A flood of blood mixed with vomit choked off him and his tongue dropped to the floor with the splatter of effluvium.

"Where you are guilty of vanity, this young man is guilty of lust." Redbeard laughed again as Drew passed him, "While you lay sleeping, he bought the services of several of My Girls."

I looked at my fiancé. His taut abs shown perfectly by the blood spattered white T-shirt as he danced around the table. His eyeless face still had smooth tanned skin with a hint of stubble. The tight black jeans skimmed a pert bum and shapely calves and for a moment, I felt a flare of desire for him.

"Tut, tut. He snared you as he snared the others, Lass. Do you know how many women he's dating?" Redbeard drew on his pipe and blew a cloud of smoke out that resolved into the number thirteen.

"Kareggg…" Drew tried again, shaking his head.

"When he told you that you were the only one, that he wanted to marry you, he condemned himself. T'was the work of a moment to bring him to his fate."

Redbeard stood up and strode across to me.

I stared up into the old man's eyes, felt the heat of flame crisping my skin and a hot, dry wind that blew the curls back from my face.

"And you, Lass. You escaped me once, but no more. I come to collect my dues."

"I was vain when I was younger. The money went to my head and being a normal teenager I didn't listen," I told him, my gaze unwavering. "I don't care what I look like now. I work for a children's charity and do a good job. When my feet were removed, I began to repent immediately. But those feet stopped me from completing the task."

A white light shimmered in the opposite corner of the kitchen and Redbeard cursed, "Stay out of it Zacharael"

"Nay, Vetis. The Woman hath the truth of it and I am here to absolve her. Karen, dost thou repent of the vain and deceitful way that thou didst have as a child?" Zacharael stepped out of the light, his white wings brushing the ceiling. Vetis backed off as Drew stopped dancing in circles and jigged on the spot, reaching out towards me.

"I do repent of those and all the sins I may have committed since," I replied with fervour. A white light surrounded me and suddenly I had real feet again. I could feel the cold tiles and the skirting board against my ankles.

"Damnation! I did think ye less resilient than that. Never mind for I have this boy to play with." Redbeard smiled and pulled Drew to him.

"Can you do anything about this?" I glanced at Zacharael whose handsome face was full of pity.

"Nay, sweet woman. This man hath chosen his own path. Vetis told you truth there," the angel replied. "Yet you could still help him."

I looked at Drew. Vetis Redbeard was in the process of stripping the clothes from his body. "How?"

"Do you love him?" Zacharael asked.

I thought about the times we had spent making love, the laughter we had shared and a wave of love swept through me. Then the times that he had told me "I'm working late. I'll be home by ten," but had crept in at twelve; or "She means nothing to me. You are the only one," when I'd caught him flirting. I felt sick. The number of bad outweighed the good. I closed my eyes. "I can't love him anymore, but neither can I criticise him."

"Not good enough, Lass!" Vetis snarled, "You are but one who has been damaged; he would need all thirteen o'ye to forgive him." His victim screamed high and long.

I felt a slick of blood wash over my toes and looked up. Drew still danced. With each step his blood pumped out, his skin dangling from Vetis' hand.

"Karennng." The raw man said, dancing towards me, "Saggge beee."

I looked at Zacharael, "I would have to get the other twelve to forgive him?" The angel nodded.

Vetis hooked his nails into Drew's back and yanked out his spine. Still the living corpse danced, just a few steps away from me, staring.

Tears slipped down my cheeks. I looked at Drew and shook my head. "I'm sorry. I can't save you. You will have to do that yourself."

Stepping forward I placed my lips to Drew's, feeling the salty metallic taste of his blood seeping into my mouth. As I moved away again I said, "I forgive you, but I doubt that the others will once they found out, Drew."

Vetis crowed with triumph, grabbing Drew's arm "He is mine!"

There was a spray of blood and flesh as the demon ripped Drew apart. I felt large gobbets of both strike me. Then with a rumble and a roar, the demon took his prey to hell.

Zacharael shook his head slowly. "You could have saved him Karen. All you had to do was pledge to help him. Now your torment will not end, even after death." The angel gave me a sad look and disappeared into his light.

Tap, Tap, Tap, Tapetty Tap…
Tap, Tap, Tap, Tapetty Tap…

The red shoes were in front of me, dancing softly.

The New Messengers of Death

By
William Wolford

Death stands on the sidewalk of a busy city scoping out his next victim. Invisible to those around him, he crosses the street in the midst of the crowd, invisible to those around him.

Death turns to his right to see an SUV run a red light. “Halt!” he yells, but he has no command over those who aren't aware he's there. The impact of the front end of the SUV sends Death flying through the air and he lands hard on the other side of the street.

Oh no, he thinks, *I can't get up. I've done something to my knee. Shit. Without me life will run rampant across the earth. How terrible! No man will be able to walk down the street without bumping shoulders with another.*

Although Death is supposed to be invisible, the man whom he intended to be his next victim turns around and sees Death lying on the concrete, incapacitated.

He walks over to Death with wide eyes and says, “Are you alright?”

“Yes, Andy Shagran, I am fine. I seem to have injured my knee and I can't stand up.”

Andy recoils. “How the hell do you know my name?” he asks.

"I am Death, Andy, and I have come to claim you. This injury will prevent me from doing my job however, and now earth is going to end up being overpopulated by humanity. I despair at the thought."

Andy bends down and looks at Death's knee. "It seems to be dislocated," he says, "but I can fix it -- if you'll let me go, that is. Do we have a deal?"

"Hmm. Yes, I suppose I'll let you live for awhile longer if you can help me fix my knee and get up so I can continue working."

Andy pops Death's knee back into place with a loud CLICK! and smiles. "That's all," he says.

"Ah, what a relief. Thank you, Andy," Death says as he stands up.

"Not a problem. Just glad you're going to let me live," Andy laughs, and extends his hand towards Death.

Death grabs a hold of Andy's hand and sinks his skeletal fingers into Andy's skin. Andy recoils and yells.

"Ah!" he yells. "You said you'd let me go!"

"And I will, but I thought I'd give you a quick preview of what's to come whenever I do finally come to take you away." Rotten green flesh forms over Death's skull allowing him to articulate a wicked smile. Pus oozes from festering sores all over his body. His left eye hangs from the socket still attached by a length of optic nerve.

Andy tries to tear himself from Death's grip but Death is far too strong for that. "Let me go!" Andy yells. "You've deceived me!"

"Oh, Andy, I'd never deceive you. I'm far too grateful for that. I just wanted to make sure that you'd never forget about me, never forget that I'm always just one step behind you. I'll give you a fair amount of notice before I come for you -- I'll send you my messengers -- but be sure, Andy, that I will come for you one day. Do you understand?"

Andy nods. Tears rolls from his eyes. The pain of the skeletal hand being lodged in his flesh causes him great pain, each finger like a knife. Death wriggles his hand and pulls it out. Andy flinches. “Y-yes, I understand,” he mumbles.

“What a good boy,” Death says and pats Andy on the head. Again the twisted smile finds its way to his lips and Death begins to walk away. “Be seeing you, Andy.”

Andy falls to the ground crying. His fellow citizens see him fall and rush to his aid. He's bombarded by people asking him, “Are you okay?” Someone yells, “Call an ambulance!” Andy blacks out.

* * *

Thirty years have passed since Andy's meeting with Death. Andy is lying in bed, sleeping.

He wakes up to an unusual moaning sound. His wife isn't in their bed so he thinks that she must be sick. Andy gets out of bed and walks over to the bathroom door. He knocks and says, “Julia? Julia, are you alright in there?”

“Mmmmmmmmmmmmm,” is the only reply he receives.

“Julia, can you hear me?”

` “Mmmmmmmmmmmmm...”

Maybe she's sick, Andy thinks. *I should probably check on her.* He opens the door and he is filled with horror, as Julia is no longer the woman he loves. The familiar sight of pus oozing from sores and rotten green flesh makes his stomach feel weak. “Julia,” he whispers.

“Mmmmmmmmmmmm!” she yells, and charges him. He runs to his nightstand and pulls out his .9 millimeter. *Ohgodohgodohgod! I never thought I'd have to use this, especially not on* Julia!

He fumbles around with the bullets. He grimaces and pulls hard on the trigger.

BOOM!

Julia's brains splatter against the wall and she falls to the floor.

Andy drops his gun, sits down on his bed, and places his head in his hands. “Julia,” he whispers and tears begin to fall from his eyes.

He hears multiple voices making the moaning sound his late wife had been making when he discovered her. His heart begins to race. He stands up and exhales. *If I don't kill them, they're going to kill me.*

Andy gathers himself, his gun, and all of the ammo in the shelf of his nightstand. He walks from his bedroom to the bottom of the steps and sees around twenty zombies. “Oh, fuck...” he whispers. He walks halfway up the steps again and places his hands on his hips. He takes a deep breath and then steps the rest of the way down the stairs, into plain sight of the zombies.

A chorus of “Mmmmmmmmmmmm's erupts. A zombie charges Andy and he recoils, reeling off a shot. Luckily it finds the zombie's brain and it falls to the ground, hard.

The rest of the zombies stop moving. With a POOF! they all disappear.

Andy takes a deep breath and sits on the bottom step of his staircase, breathing hard. *Damn,* he thinks, *that wasn't too bad.* He smiles to himself. And then, Death taps him on the shoulder.

Andy jumps up and turns around. He raises his gun and pulls the trigger, but the gun dry fires. His stomach begins to feel sick, and he drops the gun to the floor. *Damn,* he thinks. *I forgot to put more rounds in after Julia startled me.*

Death smiles. “I told you I'd be one step behind you, Andy.”

“You also told me you'd send messengers to tell me that you were coming so that I could prepare myself. You're a lying bastard.”

Death shakes his head. “Andy, Andy, Andy. Always jumping to conclusions. You thought I was going to kill you after you helped me whenever we first met, but I kept true to my word and let you live then. Why would I lie to you about messengers? You were just too blind to see them. The zombies were my messengers, Andy. Did you not notice how they were moulded in my likeness?”

“What the hell ever. Just kill me. Do whatever you have planned quickly and just let me go to my grave in peace.”

“Oh, it isn't that simple. I'm not just going to kill you and be done with it. No, no, not that simple. You're going to be one of my messengers, Andy.”

“What? Hell no! You said you'd take away my life, not torture me! I won't become one of *those*. . . one of the living dead.”

“Oh, Andy. Every human is amongst the living dead. Once you're born you immediately begin to die. Besides what makes you think you have a choice?” Death laughs as he reaches out and grabs a hold of Andy's wrist. Andy struggles but he can't pull away. His flesh begins to rot, flakes of green flesh fall to the ground and his eyeball pops out of the socket. He tries to speak out in protest, but nothing coherent comes out. All Andy can muster is...

“N-no... Mmmmmmmmmmmm!”

Death laughs as his twisted smile finds a way on to his lips again. “That'll do, Andy. Come on, everyone, it's time to get back to work.” The fallen zombies rise and the entire entourage -- including Death's newest messenger –

head out Andy's front door and into the world to bring Death to their next victim.

The Other Glass Slipper

By
Jessy Marie Roberts

Elle's heart skipped a beat when she was summoned down the sparkling clean stairwell, taking care to tip-toe on the outside of the steps to avoid marring the shining surface. Her back ached from scrubbing the stairs, hunched over for hours at a time, her hands blistering as she dunked them in hot, sudsy water and then scraped the bristles of a sturdy, stinking brush against the tiered walkway.

Still, she thought as she caught a glimpse of the handsome Prince waiting at the foot of the stairs, her punishment for attending the Royal Ball -- which consisted of toiling as the lowliest scullery maid twelve hours a day instead of her usual ten -- was worth it. She had danced in the arms of the Prince and she had known in that one fleeting moment what true love felt like. Though she had thought it was unlikely they would ever be reunited, Elle had been content to live with the memory of her one perfect night.

One perfect night until the clock struck midnight.

In her haste to return to her stepmother's manor before her fairy godmother's magic wore off, Elle had left behind a glass slipper. The delicate footwear was held in between the Prince's large, slender hands, awaiting her turn to try on the slipper. If the shoe fit, she would become a princess.

The Prince held out his hand and Elle gently placed her fingers against his palm. “Mi'lord,” she said demurely, dropping into a curtsy before following him to the lush settee in the parlour where Elle's fuming stepmother and two obnoxious, malicious stepsisters waited, disappointment and fury etched into their ugly features. The Prince handed the slipper to a footman and watched as Elle extended her left foot, her tiny, pink-tipped toes wiggling. Seconds later, the shoe slipped over her foot, a perfect fit.

“It's you!” the Prince cried, dropping to his knees in front of Elle, cupping her flushed cheeks in his hands, bringing her face close to his for a sweet, simple kiss. As his lips brushed against hers, Elle's eyes shot open and she screamed, the blood-curdling noise echoing through the crowded room.

“Get it off!” she shrieked, pushing against the Prince's chest and drawing her slippered foot to her chest. The crystalline sheath was drenched in crimson, blood spurting from the edges of the shoe and showering the Persian carpet adorning the hardwood floor. “Get this blasted thing *off* of me!”

One footman grasped Elle's calf while the other jerked on the slipper, trying to remove the slipper from her injured foot. “Tis stuck, Your Highness,” the footman reported to the Prince through heaving gasps as he grew exhausted trying to pry the footwear loose.

The resounding crack of bones being crushed rushed through the manor and Elle shouted with pain. More blood pulsed from the slipper, sticky and hot.

“You're going to have to clean that mess up, you know,” Elle's stepmother cackled from her perch on the fireplace hearth, delight twisting her sharp, haggard features into a macabre smirk. The two sisters croaked tittering giggles, exchanging gleeful, cross-eyed glances.

The Prince unsheathed his sword and leapt across the room, bringing the blade to the stepmother's throat. “What evil have you performed on my one true love, madam?” he hissed through clenched teeth.

“Tis not of my doing, Prince Charming,” the stepmother mocked her dark eyes glossy with pleasure.

The Prince pressed the blade tighter against her exposed neck. “Your Highness,” one of the footman screeched, pointing at Elle's encapsulated foot, “it's eating through her ankle!”

Turning, the Prince dashed to Elle's side, a panicked look crossing his chiselled face. “What is happening?”

Elle let loose a final, ear-splitting shout of agony as the back of the glass slipper ate through her Achilles tendon, chomped through bone, and sawed through the base of her leg. Her amputated foot fell to the carpet with a muted thud, then bounced across the floor until it collided with the hardwood and shattered into a thousand stark red slivers of glass. Elle's foot, crushed and mutilated, lay in a mangled heap in the middle of the grisly wet shards. She slumped into the settee, unconscious.

Shaking out of his shocked stillness, the Prince drew Elle's limp frame against his chest. “Get something to staunch the flow of blood!”

The footmen raced out of the room to search for something to dress the abhorrent wound.

Elle's two stepsisters sat cross-legged on the edge of the widening circumference of blood and traced the pads of their stubby, crooked fingers through the gooey gore. “Tic-Tac-Toe, sister?” one asked her elder sister.

“Why, yes, sis –”

With a flurry of smoke and blackness, Elle's fairy godmother appeared in the room. She glanced at her goddaughter, a frown furrowing her aged brow, and clucked her tongue. "Oh, my child," she chided, “I warned

you the magic would cease when the clock struck midnight. This slipper," she spat, gesturing at the shattered remnants of the fragile shoe, "went bad. Don't you understand? The magic has *turned*!"

Elle's body convulsed, her teeth clamping together, slicing through the tip of her tongue. The wet, pink muscle dribbled off her shaking lips and danced a bloody trail down her chin to plop and rest within the recesses of her pale, abundant cleavage.

"Please," the Prince pleaded, dropping to his knees before the elegantly clad fairy. "What must I do to stop this madness? My kingdom for my love," he bartered, tears brimming in his deep blue eyes, the salty droplets becoming trapped in the tips of his gloriously long black eyelashes before slipping over the masculine contours of his graceful, royal countenance.

The godmother trailed her star-tipped magic wand through the air as she contemplated the Prince's offer. "A generous offer, Prince Charming," she said, "but the magic has already turned bad. There is nothing I can do to help Cinderella." She smiled, the serene expression not quite reaching her wide, empty eyes. "Or any of the rest of you," she added.

"The rest of us? My girls and I have done nothing but enjoy the show," the stepmother interjected, concerned for the first time that evening.

The footmen burst into the parlour, white bed sheets draped across their arms. "For your lady, Your Highness," one said, thrusting the linen toward the Prince.

Looking down at Elle's stiff face, the Prince shook his head sadly. "Tis too late. My love is with us no more."

"And she is the lucky one," the fairy godmother cried, whipping her wand over her head and then arcing it through the air until it pointed at the shattered slipper's remains. "*May vas trucido populus*," she screamed, arching

her back, luminescent sparks of light shooting from the wand.

The bright red shards of glass lifted into the air and spun in a circle, the dripping slivers spinning into a tunnel, gaining momentum with each rotation. The twister skipped across the ground and tore through the first footman, grating through the fabric of his uniform and prying its way into his stomach, slivering off tiny chunks of flesh with each unsightly spin, spewing blood and viscera in every direction.

The footman screamed, brought his hands to his ravaged midsection, only to have the sharp, vicious whirlwind hack through his fingers and hands, leaving only jagged stumps to protect his torso.

The second footman tried to sprint out of the room, but the cutting edge of the tornado swept through his legs, dicing up his ankles and calves. The bottom halves of his legs relegated to nothing more than a slushy pile of grated skin, bone, and tissue, he fell to the ground and tried to pull himself out of the room, until the whizzing shards made short work of his hands and arms.

The stepmother and her two daughters hid behind the Prince. He drew his sword, jutted out his chest in pride and yelled, “To me, you unnatural cyclone! I shall temper your bad magic with the mighty steel of A Kingdom Far Away!”

With the flick of her wrist, the fairy godmother directed the glass tornado toward the Prince and the whimpering women. The Prince swiped his sword through the air as the magical whirlwind approached, desperately trying to hack the slippery menace into bits, but to no avail. The twister easily ate through the metal blade, the jewelled hilt, the gloved hand of the future King, spinning and slicing through his arm until it reached his shoulder where

it hesitated for a brief moment before tearing through his beautiful head.

The stepmother squealed with displeasure and fear as she was splattered with the Prince's royal brain matter and blood. Grasping a daughter in each hand, the stepmother drew her children in front of her and pushed them toward the glass windstorm. “Take them! Take them all! I ask only that you spare me,” the stepmother begged as she watched the spiralling slipper shards eviscerate her daughters.

The stepmother tried to step backward, away from the magical onslaught, but slipped in the drooping mess of intestines spilling out of her younger daughter's body. She fell to the ground, slopping in the grotesque mess. “Please,” she cried again, dragging a blood-soaked hand across her sweating brow. “Spare my life.”

The godmother growled a bitter laugh. "You are the cause of this gruesome scene, madam," she scolded, turning the wand in the air, whipping the slipper shards into a more grandiose fury. The twister whooshed with power, hovering right in front of the evil stepmother's face.

“I had nothing to do with it!” the stepmother shrieked, covering her face with her hands.

The godmother clicked her tongue against the roof of her mouth. “The moral of the story, madam, is you should have been nice to poor, little Cinderella.” With a final burst of magical energy, the fairy pointed her wand at the stepmother. Seconds later, the stepmother was nothing more than a mushy glop of visceral goo.

After the massacre, the fairy godmother winked at the two sneering mice high-fiving each other in the corner, their white fur soaked in carnage. “Bibbidi-Bobbiti-Boo,” she sang, and with a snap of her fingers, vanished in a poof of smoke.

The Angel

By
Brad Nelson

When an innocent child dies, an angel comes to earth and takes it in his arms. He spreads his divine wings and carries the child to all the places it loved during life. The angel plucks flowers from each place and gives them to the child to carry up to heaven, where the child will plant the flowers in happiness. This pleases God, and He will kiss the flower that most pleases Him, giving the flower sentience so that the flower may keep the child company while the child waits for family to arrive.

"Look below you," said one of the angels to the dead child he was carrying, and the child heard the angel's voice as if dreaming. The child looked down and saw the familiar places of its short life: its home, the playground across the street, its grandmother's house, its school, and all the places where it had ever experienced joy. "Which flowers shall we pick and take with us to heaven?" asked the angel.

The child pointed. Behind the house of the child's grandmother was a once-beautiful rosebush whose stem had been broken by a wicked hand, and the bush's half-opened blossoms hung from withered branches. "Let us take that poor bush so that it may bloom again in heaven's garden," said the child with a tear in its eye.

The angel swooped low, plucking the rosebush as they passed, and then, smiling to himself, the angel kissed

the child for its tender thought. They passed over all the child's favourite places, plucking flowers from each, until they had a wonderful bouquet worthy of heaven's soil.

"This should be enough," said the child, but they did not fly upward yet.

It was now night and very quiet. The angel and the child were still hovering over the Earth in the child's hometown near a dirty, narrow alley cluttered with old newspapers and broken bottles and rubbish of all sorts. The angel pointed down at the alley.

In a corner where a large dumpster met the alley wall was a pure white lily surrounded by shards of a broken flowerpot. The lily had taken root in the trash piled up in the corner. Against all odds the flower thrived, a spot of light amidst great darkness.

"We shall take this one with us as well," said the angel. "And I shall tell you its story as we fly." And this the angel did.

"At the end of that alley is a door that leads to a dank cellar where there once lived a poor boy with his widowed mother. The mother was sick and bedridden most of the time, and the dampness of the cellar did not help matters any. The boy and his mother had no money, which is why they lived in a cellar, and the only food they ate was what the boy could beg for downtown or find in trash cans around town.

"All the boy knew of life he knew from the charity, or lack thereof, of others. He did not know the joys of childhood as most children know them. His mother was his only joy, and her smile was the only thing that could make him smile. All his mother could remember of life was the inside of that cellar.

"One spring day, while the boy was begging in the market, a kind florist took pity on the boy. The florist gave the boy a prize lily of the purist white, potted in the richest

soil. The boy broke down in tears crying, 'Thank you, sir. Oh, thank you. My mother will be so happy.' With tears streaming down his young face and all thoughts of food forgotten, the boy hurried back toward his cellar.

"As the boy approached the alley, a group of local boys approached from the other direction. The leader of the group saw the poor boy and called to him. 'Hey, kid, where'd ya' steel that flower from?' The poor boy said nothing as he walked past the group, turning into the alley.

"The leader of the local boys stepped forward and snatched the potted lily. 'Please, no. It's for my sick mother,' said the poor boy. The other boy laughed, 'Then we'll just plant it right here for her,' and the boy threw the flower at a nearby dumpster, shattering the pot into a hundred pieces.

"The poor boy ran to dumpster, heartbroken, and knelt to pick up the lily. The other boy followed him over, mocking him with fake sobs, and then planted his foot between the poor boy's shoulders and shoved him over. The poor boy's head smashed into the brick wall of the alley, and he lay there cradling the lily, bleeding to death as the local boys left laughing.

"It has been a year, and since then, the flower has taken root, fighting for survival just like the boy and his mother had, striving -- waiting. And that is the story of the flower -- a flower meant for a queen -- we have just added to our heavenly bouquet."

The child looked upon the angel in horror. "But how could you possibly know all of that?" the child asked.

"I know it," said the angel, "because I myself was the poor boy bringing this flower to my mother. And you -- you were the cruel boy who murdered me."

Then the child truly opened his eyes and saw the reddish-orange tint of the angel's skin, the black horns

protruding from his forehead and the leathery black wings spread flapping on either side of the angel.

For you see, when an evil child dies, an angel comes to earth and takes it in his arms. He spreads his divine wings and carries the child to all the places it loved during life. The angel plucks flowers from each place and gives them to the child to carry down to hell, where the child will plant the flowers in sorrow. This pleases Satan, and he will kiss the flower that most pleases him, giving the flower sentience so that the flower may torment the child while the child waits for eternity to end...

Little Red Riding Hood and Marcel

By
Chris Bartholomew

Well then, to begin at the beginning, his name was Marcel. Yes, Marcel. No one ever bothered to give a name for him but I do so now to get the record straight.

Long before Marcel was born, there was a time of great upheaval in fourteenth century France. You might not have heard of this great thing because it was between the wolf community and the gods of the universe. Let us just call it a bargain and that will suffice for now.

This was the agreement struck between the wolves and the gods that the wolves would kill and sacrifice one human heart each year in exchange for the ability to speak. By the time Marcel began to hunt, speaking wasn't unusual. After all, he didn't know any different, but thought wolves had always been this way. He did notice that speaking to people brought him more successful hunting than talking to other animals, and so began his long and profitable dealings with the gods.

People didn't go into the woods often, and so Marcel practiced on the other animals. He had a fascination with people, the way they spoke and walked, so he spent a lot of time at the edge of the woods, observing. He would come home and practice what he saw.

Learning to walk on his hind legs was the hardest part, they say, and very entertaining.

If you can imagine, here is this rather large wolf, creeping up on you with his forelegs dangling as if in a prance, and his large head bowed out in front, fangs showing and he says something like, “Good evening.” The voice is low and seems to come from his chest rather than his mouth, and the drool is something of a sight. The other animals laughed and ran away. As you see, he couldn't move fast on only two legs.

The first time he confronted a man, Marcel was leaning against a tree. He put himself there when he heard someone walking in the woods and followed them. Finding that it was a man, he got on his hind legs, and stayed that way using the tree to support him. As the man approached, he said, “Good evening, sir,” and the man couldn't believe his ears.

Terrified but curious, the man said, “Did I just hear you speak? No, I suppose not.”

Marcel said, “Good evening, sir. I believe it is customary for you to say that back to me and tip your hat.”

The man was so terrified, he could not even move, so that was the first kill of that kind for Marcel, and he left the heart for the gods. He found he had a penchant for human meat and in fact, after that he couldn't get enough.

Soon not even his pack wanted to be around him. He would get moody, bite and stalk his brothers and sisters. Finally his father could take no more of him and so he told Marcel to go away or face certain death. Marcel was old enough to be on his own so the pack forced him out.

Some brief time went by that no one came through the woods, so Marcel went into town, letting people here and there see him. He did this because he knew the people of the community wouldn't tolerate a wolf running around,

and that they would follow him out into his domain, the woods.

It took about two weeks for the people to believe and form a group for the hunt. They came with weapons, thinking they would kill Marcel, but he was too sly for them.

He stalked the stalkers, and one by one he was able to kill twelve of the men, one right after another, dragging them to a little hideout he had made by a cold river, keeping the meat cool for later, and giving the many hearts to the gods. The bargain that was between the wolves and the gods was for only one heart per year, but Marcel felt more sacrifices would mean more protection for him.

Marcel knew he was within his rights and when his father sought him out to tell him to quit being so greedy, Marcel laughed and said he would do as he pleased, after all, he was the strongest, smartest wolf in the woods.

True, Marcel was out of control, but he was, after all, a wolf.

Marcel felt protected by the gods. He thought he kept them happy with the hearts he was providing them, and that the other wolves should be happy that he was doing all the work. Although the other wolves hated it that Marcel was killing so many humans, they also loved the tasty meat.

The only thing about his life that was not right was the loneliness because none of the other animals would come near him, not even another wolf. The only time he had any communion with other beings was when he stalked a human.

After years of just stalking and killing, he began to have conversations with the people he killed -- before he ate them, of course. He didn't always go for the throat; sometimes he ate them slowly, starting with the feet. He didn't want a relationship, you see, just hearing the sound

of screaming was enough. He felt nothing for the humans he met and stalked, he just wanted to hear something other than his own voice.

He spent more and more time at night in the town listening wherever he could find a few people gathered. He spent so much time listening, that he became cleverer with each killing. The other animals could have learned a great deal about hunting had they not been so afraid of Marcel.

In his stalking, he was able to walk, after years of practice, on his hind legs without the support of trees at all. When he began, remember, he used a tree to keep stable, and then, slowly, he was able to walk from tree to tree needing support for shorter lengths of time, until finally, he was able to walk a mile or so, just as if he were human. Of course, it was still slow -- even a bit painful -- but to him it was worth the pain it caused.

During the day, he would sometimes lounge under the shade of a willow. He would hide there and watch the animals of the woods feed on the meat he left behind by the river. He was glad to be able to watch the ravishing animals at work eating his kill. He was at the point by then that he didn't eat anything but human flesh and innards. He wanted no other food.

Marcel would listen as people tried to talk him out of eating them and sometimes let them go on and on while he sat there and listened. They knew they didn't have a chance at out-running Marcel once he had them in front of him.

“I am a terrible choice for your dinner. I have a terrible disease that you will catch. No one would come within this distance to see me because I will make them sick. I have no friends even. Trust me, you'll die a horrible death,” one man told him.

“I'll start with your foot then, and if I get sick, you can get away.”

"But it takes days to get sick from eating my sickness. You would have to wait at least a few to see. Just let me go. Surely you can find another to replace me. I have a family and am needed at home."

"Well if it would take days, then I'll take my chances. After all, you just said your family needs you, but before that you said no one will come near you," Marcel said.

This banter went on for a while, but Marcel grew tired of the man's begging and lying. So when he went for the man's throat, the man put his arm in the way and was able to get the most horrible screams out while wrestling with Marcel that the animals from miles around shuddered at the sound.

Sitting under the willow tree at daybreak, after eating all of the man that he possibly could, and to get it out of his mind that perhaps the man wasn't untruthful, Marcel listened to the other wolves talk about him. Wind carried sound right to him; he heard every word.

"Marcel should have been dealt with a long time ago. Why we let him rule the woods is beyond me. I am the leader of this pack," said one wolf.

"Yes, you are, but he is no longer a part of your pack so it doesn't really matter what you think. None of us are able, nor are we willing to do anything but stay away from Marcel," said another.

"You are the leader, but all you can do is complain. None of us is like him. Marcel could be the leader if he wanted to. You are lucky he stays away as you want him to," yet another wolf from the pack said.

"If none of you can say anything positive, say nothing. I'm not asking for help, and indeed, I don't plan to approach Marcel. He is beyond help now. All he wants is to kill. He doesn't want to belong. We have to stay away from him; I just think we should have killed him when we had

the chance. He brings man into the woods. All it would take is one of them to get away from him and we'd be done for. Do you think the people would care who they killed? They wouldn't be able to tell if it was Marcel or me. Remember this day; he will get us all killed sooner or later. All it will take is one."

Listening to the pack leader's words made Marcel queasy and he howled as he'd never done before. The sound was so loud and so menacing that the other wolves ran away as fast as they could. Marcel laughed and laughed until he nearly got sick. The funniest thing he'd ever seen in his life was the pack leader running with his tail between his legs.

With nothing to do, and getting smarter and learning a great deal from his conversations with his prey, he decided to go from one end of the woods to the other. He didn't know how long that would take as he'd never done it before, but suddenly he became curious. It dawned on him that going through his woods must be a short cut to somewhere, and he decided to find out where.

He was a little bit on the lazy side; he'd gotten that way through the years of hunting humans, and gotten so good at it that he lounged around most of the time. He decided that to let one man go to find out the end of the short cut would be a good trade.

Walking towards town in his usual lazy way, he stopped beside a small trail where he'd followed one of his victims and waited for someone to come along and show him the way. He didn't have to wait very long before a woman came along and began walking into the woods. He followed her quietly, as a wolf would do, for some distance. She ended the walk at a little house on the other side of the woods. It took nearly the entire day to get there, and Marcel was tired when they were finally at the end.

He decided to sleep the night in the woods by the little house that the woman had gone into. He slept very well, and when he awoke, that same woman was drawing water from a well and talking to another woman as she did so.

"It was very thoughtful of you to come for a visit. I've been so sick, not to mention afraid to walk into town. You know about the disappearances of people around here. Going through the woods wasn't a good idea. You should have borrowed a carriage to come here."

"Oh bother, Aunt Edna. No telling why those people went missing. They might have taken a wrong turn. You know these woods are full of animals and cliffs, and then there's the river. Those rapids could take you clean away if you happened to fall in trying to get a drink. I passed it coming here and it is very violent. I didn't even try to catch some water for my trip. I brought everything with me."

Marcel listened intently to their words and decided to practice with his voice. He found that he could almost sound like the old woman, but not the young one. He practiced and practiced until he had the older voice down to a perfect match. Imitating people's voices was just something to do at the time for Marcel; he didn't know it would someday come in handy.

The two women went back into the house and Marcel waited to have the one whom he had followed for dinner, but she got into a carriage and rode back that way.

From that time on, when he caught someone and before he killed and ate them, he had long conversations, imitating them as best he could. Before long, he was able to sound perfectly like anyone he captured, and this kept him busy and delighted for quite some time. The fright at hearing a wolf talk was worth the effort of learning to imitate humans.

Marcel could even sound like a baby crying for its mother, he got so well accustomed to the imitating of people. When he walked into town, as he sometimes did when he had nothing else to do at night, he would wait in a dark alley, and when someone walked past, he would say something to make them come back. He did this often and would have to run back into the woods because the fright on the people's faces would make him laugh and howl so loud.

The howling was curious to the other animals and they thought it strange that Marcel mostly used words now for everything, never barking or whining. But that howl would come at times almost as if he couldn't control it. Hearing it made the other wolves wish he could be part of the pack, yet they knew he was too far-gone to return to being fully one of them.

Soon it got to where after a big meal and before he slept for the night, he would howl and howl at the moon, sometimes for thirty minutes. The other wolves felt bad for him until, that is, the next day when they would go and see what he had done to the humans he feasted on.

They all had to do what they had to do. Having young to feed and needing to keep up their own strength, they did eat his leftovers, but they weren't happy about it. Some of them even got sick after their dinner because of the disgust they felt at their deed.

One young mother came upon her son feeding on the head of one of Marcel's victims with an eye stuck between his teeth. He looked so scary that she almost killed the pup because of fright.

It was an awesome dinner, yet revolting because they knew this was not what they were supposed to be doing. They all knew that someday Marcel would not be around. The entire pack was getting lazy knowing Marcel would feed them every day. They worried whether they

would ever be able to go back to hunting the other animals, yet they didn't do anything about it, they just kept feasting on Marcel's catch.

Marcel went through the woods sounding more and more like the different people he had killed or overheard talking in the town. The other animals had a hard time knowing when it was Marcel and when it was a person coming through making it very hard for the mothers to teach her young how to hunt.

There were times when some of the young ones came upon Marcel thinking he was a human, and nearly lost their lives. Marcel didn't take kindly to attacks, even by a small pup.

Marcel had no desire to kill a young pup from any pack, but if they jumped on him unawares, it was a narrow escape. The older wolves were more and more frightened of him and sought one brave enough to confront him.

Marcel was thinking of a plan to bring one of the older pups to himself, one he could teach what he had learned.

As luck would have it, the very pup he chose turned out to be one of the biggest, and not only that, he was also the one chosen by the pack to put an end to Marcel and his dastardly deeds.

The day Marcel decided to take him from the pack was the very day that they decided to let the pup wander away to go after him. Marcel had already named Franklin after one of his kills -- the one whom he thought was lying about having a sickness. Marcel feared that the man was telling the truth because, since then, he was having horrible pain in his body and at times felt that his mind was not all together as it should be. He had a hard time thinking and his mind went between being purely wolf and purely human.

Marcel and the pup met deep in the woods. Marcel, not caught off-guard, brought the pup to the willow tree and they had a little talk.

Marcel told the pup, “I decided to call you Franklin because it's the name of one of my human sacrifices, the first time I let someone talk to me at length. We had quite a conversation and he told me his name. He said Franklin was a name for fame and fortune. You seem like you will be a famous wolf, just like me. You want to be famous, don't you? The pack wants you to take my place.”

“No, the pack wants you gone, and they chose me to kill you.”

“Kill me, yes but not at the moment. You will have to learn what only I can teach you to replace me. Don't you see that everyone has lost the will to hunt? I provide the meal and you have to eat. All the other wolves in these woods have also forgotten their youth and how to hunt their prey. Why, I'd almost be willing to bet that you, being young, don't even know who your enemies are.”

“They told me to kill you.”

“Oh, they did, I'm sure of that, but it makes no sense. If you are strong and smart enough to do away with me, you will end up having to do what I'm doing. You know yourself that once you've tasted human blood, no other blood will do. The meat is so tender and tasty. Yes, you might as well let me teach you before you kill me.”

This conversation made sense to them both, and they decided to be friends right there under the willow tree. The pup, Franklin, decided that since he would have to kill humans anyway, he might as well go ahead and learn from the only one in the woods who had learned to do it so well.

These words clinched it: “You know Franklin, once you kill me and take over, the packs will fear you just as they do me. It's inevitable, you know. You will end up alone.”

Marcel and Franklin were inseparable from that time forward. Everywhere Marcel went Franklin was right beside him. They practiced conversation and tone of voice. Marcel taught him to walk upright like a human. He taught him how to stalk and how to kill.

They sat under the willow and listened to the other wolves talk.

"I am the leader and I didn't make a mistake sending your strong young pup to get rid of Marcel. You know it will take time for the youngster to get his confidence up to kill him, but it will be done."

"You sent my son to his death is what you've done. I'll never forgive you for this. He should have been done and back by now. He's running with Marcel now. Take my word for it, he won't be coming back. Now we have two killers in the woods. Man will be after us now for sure."

On and on the pack talked, and Marcel and Franklin had quite a time controlling their laughter. They were the best of friends and Franklin soon learned that stalking and killing humans was the most satisfying thing he would ever do.

One night, as Marcel was showing the town to Franklin, Franklin got himself tangled in something meant to keep chickens from escaping. The man of the house heard the ruckus and came out to investigate.

"John, come back into the house. I've stuck myself with my sewing needle," Marcel said, wanting the man to go back and leave Franklin for him to untangle.

The man did run back into the house, and before he was able to figure out that it wasn't his wife's voice yelling for his help, Marcel was able to free Franklin and they ran back into the woods.

They stayed out of the town for a few weeks because it scared them both that the man could have killed one of them.

They continued to stalk and kill, and Marcel thought if it were possible, Franklin loved this more than he did. Franklin was younger, more agile, and constantly running around looking for a stray human to feast on. His appetite was bigger than Marcel's and he was physically larger.

One night Marcel was terrified for his friend as Franklin had gone and not said where he was going. Marcel wandered around the woods for hours looking for him and couldn't find him anywhere. Finally deciding that Franklin must be in town, Marcel went there looking for him.

Roaming the streets and paying special attention to the alleys, as this is where Marcel had shown him how to scare people, he still saw no sign of his good friend and was really beginning to worry when he thought of the chickens and wondered if he'd gone there again.

As he approached the house, he saw the lights were all on and went to the window to listen to the conversation as he could hear voices within.

"John, I'm so proud of you for killing that wolf. He could have eaten our daughter, Cindy."

Those words and the sight a moment later of Franklin laying there dead made Marcel's sanity snap. Not even going into a short period of mourning, Marcel thought of the daughter inside the house. He thought of revenge, of hate and a longing to see those inside the house suffer and the daughter die.

Day and night he stalked this family waiting for the opportunity to lure them into the woods. He didn't care how it happened. He thought all the time of killing them and putting his friend's killers through the worse torture he could think of because his friend's death tortured him.

He hated having to leave the family to find him another sacrifice, but he had to live long enough to exact revenge on these people. So leave and kill he did as needed,

but he didn't linger anymore under the willow tree. He spent all his time watching and waiting.

Finally, the time arrived when he saw the child. She was very little and not walking so, he waited through the years for her to grow up. Never has a being such as this walked the earth. Marcel, in his hatred and determination to kill the child, was nothing more than a killing machine, only killing to survive for the right time.

One day, the old man finally went into the woods. Marcel almost grabbed him and had him for dinner, but decided to see where the man was going, because he thought that maybe it would help him get to the little girl.

They ended up at a little cottage and Marcel went to the window to see what he could hear.

"Mother, how are you feeling? Cindy is almost big enough to come see you by herself, but she has a cold right now so I didn't bring her. I felt like taking a walk instead of coming by the road. Such nice weather, it's cool but not unbearable."

"It's okay, son. I wanted to talk to you anyway. I've been a bit sickly lately, but I've made Cindy a cloak and hat. Red is her favourite colour. What do you think?"

Marcel saw the old woman hold up the reddest thing he'd ever seen. It was a coat, he knew, but with a hood attached to it. He thought that would be wonderful. If the daughter walked through the woods with that bright thing on, there would be no mistake that it would be the right person.

He decided to go finally to the willow tree and he sat there practicing the old woman's tone of voice. He talked and talked of the red coat, of Franklin and revenge. He thought it sounded quite funny coming from an old woman voice, but he kept it up, every day and night. From time to time, he'd go to the house of Cindy to see what was going on or just to make sure that she was still there. Once

he worried that she might die of something before he could kill her, so he once again began to check every day to make sure.

Hate was consuming Marcel. It kept him alive past the lifespan of most wolves. He thought he could live forever -- waiting to capture the one, the murderer of his friend loved the most on the earth.

He spent days between Cindy's house and her grandmother's. He let the father and the mother live, knowing they would make sure the daughter lived long enough to be his meal. He thought constantly of her soft skin as he would bite into it. He thought of letting her beg long and hard for her life, and then taking little nips and bites so that she would suffer, and in her screams, he would find refuge and rest.

Marcel wondered at his feelings for his friend, that this could last all these years and still be so strong, this feeling of hatred for humankind. He had never had a chance before Franklin to have a friend. He took it for granted until Franklin came along that he'd be alone forever with death his only companion. When Franklin started hunting, stalking with him, he was complete, and that would never be again.

He thought of a plan long before Cindy first stepped into the woods. He was going to taunt her all the way to her grandmother's house. He'd talk to her, make friends if he could. He would kill her grandmother, her, and then her parents. He had her death worked out in his mind, and so he waited every day. For her to grow stronger and to venture into his domain was going to be the greatest fulfilment ever known to him.

He didn't pass time away idly, every moment spent planning and waiting, constantly thinking of ways to hurt and kill the ones who had ruined his life.

He smiled with the plan fully in his head. He'd wait for Cindy to come out into the woods and wait for her to get far into the woods. Following her quietly, yet making enough noise so that she knew someone or something was following, he would lean against a tree and begin a conversation about half way to the grandmother's house.

He would ask her where she was going and why. He'd maybe talk about how beautiful her red cape with the hood looked on her. Maybe he would ask her if she wanted company along the way. If she said no, he would offer to race her to the house, with her going one way, and him another.

Yes, he thought. If she said no, he would go and kill the grandmother and then take her place; after all, he could talk like her and she had been bedridden for years. He wouldn't have to worry about how he looked; he could talk from under the grandmother's covers.

Marcel played the scene repeatedly in his mind, using several scenarios, preparing for all situations, constantly running between the two houses -- sometimes fearing he missed her, yet knowing the gods were watching over him and that she would be his last capture.

He stalked and killed when he needed to eat and spent all the rest of the time willing her to come into his woods. One day, on the outskirts, as close to the house as he dared go, he heard the grandma talking to the father.

"Cindy insists that this week she is coming through the woods to visit with you. Martha has made cakes and the like for her to bring, so she'll be carrying the basket with goodies for you. You'll be able to see her through the window, so don't let anyone in unless you see that basket and her in the red cloak you made her."

"Oh, John, as if I wouldn't recognize my own dear granddaughter's voice. It's too hard for me to see out the window."

Marcel was beside himself with the news that soon his conquest would be coming, walking through the woods. The day he had waited for was fast approaching and he couldn't even think of eating at a time such as this. Everything he'd lived for all this time was about to come right into his arms, and he could think of nothing else besides his plans to get even.

He spent all of his time now beside the house of Cindy, waiting for her to come, daydreaming of how he would get them all. If she wouldn't walk with him, they'd race and he'd pretend to be the daughter at the grandmother's house, go in and kill her and replace her. Then when Cindy came, he'd let her in and toy with her for a while, and then when the parents came looking for her he'd kill them. Yes, he had it all planned and just stayed out there waiting for her to come.

Things went exactly as planned, which you already know. Something happened after that though which isn't part of the story you've heard.

When Marcel gave the heart of the child to the gods, they were so impressed that they decided Marcel would be enchanted. If a man were to be bitten by Marcel and lived, he would turn into a werewolf at the full moon for the rest of his life.

Author Biographies

S.P. Oldham is 40 years old and married with two sons. I have always written stories and poetry. Her personal writing accomplishments include the broadcast on Rutland Radio (local English radio station) of her story *'Best Served Cold,'* as The Sunday Night Story and finally achieving some financial reward recently when she placed 2nd and 6th in two separate competitions for both poetry and short stories.

Thom Olausson is 36 years old and lives in Sweden. A work-related accident ruined his spine and shoulder nine years ago and he suffers from sciatica 24/7. His horror poems are well liked and several of them have been published at Abandoned Towers, Aoife's Kiss, The Monsters Next Door, Scifaikuest, to mention a few. He has also had a poetry collection published through Diminuendo Press called A SECRET PLACE. Thom was ranked #9 Top Ten Finisher P&E Readers Poll 2009, and had two poems voted Top Ten Finishers. His favourite horror poem is *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor.

Amanda C. Davis sees invisible men in the corners and bones in the trees. Visit her at http://www.amandacdavis.com.

Canaan Frank lives in Hugo, Oklahoma with his girl friend, MaRhonda, and her son, Zackery. He works as a

pizza delivery guy at night and a butcher during the day. His short horror stories and novelettes have appeared in many print and online venues. They include magazines like "Black Petals" and anthologies such as "Demons and Shadows Issue I."

Ruth Imeson is an arachnophobic, paranormal investigating archivist from the English East Midlands. Her recent work has appeared in Twisted Legends from Pill Hill Press, and several stories are forthcoming in various anthologies from the Library of the Living Dead.

Robert Lee Frazier is a cartographer by trade. His previously published credits include an Honorable Mention in the 2009, I am the Next Mark Twain fiction contest sponsored by Harper Studio, as well as having his poetry published in the venerable Haight-Ashbury Review. He lives in Hagerstown, Maryland with his wife, four children, two in-laws and a set of lazy pugs. Robert is currently working on his first novel. He can now be found loitering on the web at http://robertleefrazier.hameandinfancy.com/

Stacy Bolli is a married mother of three little hellions and appropriately lives in the scorching state of Florida. She has had stories published with SNM Magazine, The New Flesh, House of Horror and the anthologies Bonded By Blood II: A Romance In Red and Nocturnal Illumination.

Nate Burleigh hales from Vancouver. Since becoming a father, the conglomerated stories in his mind have come to fruition in the form of bedtime stories, but the

inner horror writer in him has reared its ugly head. He's been writing prose for two years and just completed his first book "Sustenance." He has had many of his short stories publish in ezines such as: Horror Bound Magazine, SNM Horror Magazine, Micro Horror, and soon to be published in the Ruthless Anthology put out by Pill Hill Press (his first anthology). He also has a children's story published at bedtime.com, (shhhhh, don't tell anyone.)

Matt Athanasiou has yet to discover a life-size edible house, has yet to meet someone the size of his thumb, and has yet to acquire a purse that fills with gold whenever opened. But he has purchased an aged copy of *Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales* that smells of cigarettes, has been fortunate enough to have his fiction accepted by AlienSkin Magazine and StarShipSofa, and has cried, "Wolf," when he was attacked by a half-bred wolf as a child. He still thinks the large ears and great eyes made the animal look all the more playful.

Eirik Gumeny is the author of the novel *Exponential Apocalypse* and editor of Jersey Devil Press. He has previously been published in Thieves Jargon, Red Fez, Nefarious Muse, and several other online magazines. He is tall, enjoys coffee, and has no superpowers that he is aware of, though he did once survive being engulfed by flame.

Francis Wesley Alexander is an unemployed writer living in Sandusky, Ohio, USA. He spends the bewitching hour on Saturday nights typing and sending out manuscripts. Sipping rum and coke, and listening to music helps him get through the night.

A.E. Churchyard suspects that she is controlled by her cats. Both of them never take no for an answer and she has a terrible feeling that they are teaching her children the same techniques. Unfortunately in order to escape their clutches, A.E. Churchyard is forced to teach Design and Technology to secondary school pupils. This is a great source for her stories and one day she will write a horror story based on a school. Her only solace in life is her books, beads and her partner of fourteen years. She has written and published several short stories including *So That's How the Cookie Crumbled (Aka The Biscuit That Bit Back)* – published in the Creature Features anthology.

William Wolford is a seventeen year old writer and editor. Though he is young, he takes his craft seriously. He has had stories appear in Lame Goat Press's Horror Through the Ages anthology, the October 2009 issue of Static Movement, and a poem in Static Movement's Print Special No. 2. He is also editing an upcoming anthology for Lame Goat Press called Inner Fears.

Jessy Marie Roberts lives in a "haunted" house in Western Nebraska with her husband and two dogs. She grew up in Morgan Hill, California. Visit her online at jessymarieroberts.weebly.com.

Brad Nelson is a former backyard samurai and blue jeans Zen master who spends most of his time now on the back porch with his pipe and a cup of coffee. He retired his sword and took up the pen after serving five years as an interrogator in the U.S. Army. Brad is also a creative writing M.F.A. candidate at National University and Chief

Editor of Eclectic Flash, a new online literary journal. You can find Eclectic Flash at www.eclecticflash.com.

Chris Bartholomew writes dark fiction from her home in Georgia. She concentrates on the scary things in life, the scariest being submitting stories to publishers, but she wouldn't have it any other way.

www.houseofhorror.org.uk
HOUSE
OF
HORROR
HOUSE OF HORROR
2008
CREATURE FEATURES
MAUSOLEUM MEMOIRS
Frightening Fables And Freaky Fairy Tales
Stories without morals

Charlotte Emma Gledson - Horror Writer
www.charlottemmagledson.com
The Lonely Tree
and
Other Twisted Tales of Torment
by
Charlotte Emma Gledson
On Sale Now!
Amazon.com and Amazon.co.uk
And all other good retailers

Ruthless: An Extreme Shock Horror Collection
Edited by Shane McKenzie
ISBN-13: 978-1617060175

"With Ruthless, Shane McKenzie has proved yet again that politesse is overrated, that it's not necessary to be smooth and restrained, that sometimes horror needs to be rough and messy...this is the real deal. Hardcore, kick-ass, take-no-prisoners horror. It's gross, it's disgusting, it's rough, it's raw."—Bram Stoker award-winner Bentley Little

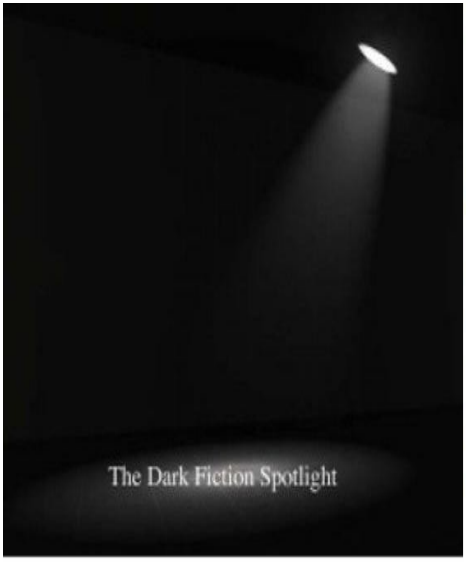
This shocking short story collection includes sick and twisted tales by the following disturbed authors: John McNee, Daniel Fabiani, Lucas Pederson, Danny Hill, Jessy Marie Roberts, Shane McKenzie, Jared Donald Blair, Lesley Conner, David Bernstein, AJ Brown, Tom Olbert, Nate Burleigh, John "Jam" Arthur Miller, Thornton Austen, Aaron J. French, Eric Stoveken, Alec Cizak, D. Krauss and Airika Sneve.

With introduction by Bentley Little.

Pandora's Nightmare: Horror Unleashed
Edited by Jessica A. Weiss
ISBN-13: 978-0984261079

The mystery surrounding Pandora has spanned the ages. The first woman. A seductress. Releaser of all evils. But was she motivated by curiosity or malice? Find out in this terrifying collection of twenty-eight horror stories inspired by the myth of Pandora's Box. From a malevolent ghost town to a doomed archaeological dig, from a haunted fortress to an alien planet, discover the depths of insatiable human depravity in these fresh twists on a favorite story—where the only thing left behind is hope.

Authors in this anthology include: D. Nathan Hilliard, Peter Charron, JW Schnarr, George W. Morrow, Neil Coghlan, A. Lee Manton, Matt Becht, J.R. Rodriguez, Scott Taylor, Jacob Bayne, Nye Joell Hardy, Chris Bartholomew, Ruth Imeson, Alva J. Roberts, Emma Kathryn, John "JAM" Arthur Miller, Bruce Memblatt, Eric W Jepson, Rebecca J. Vickery, Jessy Marie Roberts, M Sullivan, Blake Casselman, Jay Raven, Thomas M. Earnhart, Jessica A. Weiss, Laura Eno and Belen Lopez.

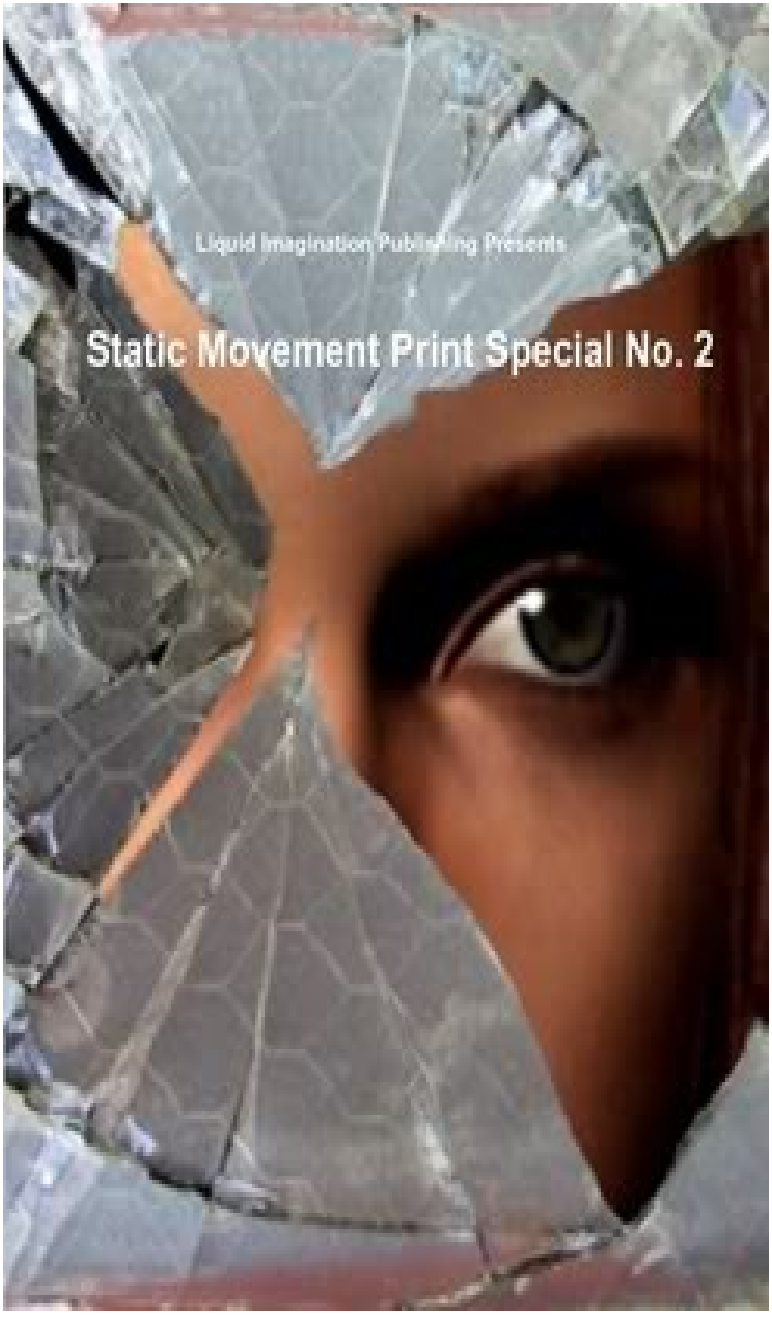


The Dark Fiction Spotlight

• First and foremost, The Dark Fiction Spotlight was created to be a safe haven for all dark fiction writers. TDFS welcomes all dark genres be it hack and slash, bizarro, extreme, psychological or even horrotica. We aim to be a home for one and all. We are a tri-monthly e-zine looking for the market's secret and established talent. We also are a paying market.

• http://www.tdfspublication.webs.com/

Author S.E. COX
Writer of Horror, Psychological Thrillers
and
Mythological Fantasy
Twisted Confusion
and other chilling Tales
S.E.Cox
From the Author of Roselia ~ Forbidden Love
BROKEN DREAMS
S.E. COX
TALES FROM THE DARK PATH
Roselia
Forbidden Love
S.E.COX
ON SALE NOW!
www.houseofhorror.org.uk
http://secox-writingfromthedarkside.moonfruit.com/
www.myspace.com/secox


Liquid Imagination Publishing Presents
Static Movement Print Special No. 2